

HOLLOW EARTH TALES

FREE eBook!



- NIGHTTIME EDITIONS -

About:

This text was compiled and released on

<https://nighttimeeditions.wordpress.com> This book is licensed for distribution under the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial 3.0 Unported (CC BY-NC 3.0). This means that it can be shared and remixed freely, but not used commercially and requires attribution.

This eBook is a small compilation of Pulp stories included in the paperback anthology **Hollow Earth Tales** (six Volumes); currently on sale on amazon.com. All stories here presented are COMPLETE and accompanied with illustrations from their original magazine format.

Order of reading: None, all stories are independent and by different authors.

The stories in this PDF file have the same layout of its paperback counterpart; the only difference being that paperback interior illustrations are all B&W, and some slightly different paper size.

For more info please visit <https://nighttimeeditions.wordpress.com/>

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

5

The Annihilator Comes

by Ed Earl Repp

6

The great airship Annihilator goes to the north pole on a rescue mission, but its crew end up finding a terrible menace . . . in the interior of the earth! Also included on paperback Hollow Earth Tales. Volume 1.

Illustrated by Leonard. (First published on Wonder Stories, 1930)

The Voice from the Inner World

by A. Hyatt Verrill

58

Steamships are disappearing after sightings of a meteor, but . . . is it really a meteor? Also included on paperback Hollow Earth Tales. Volume 1.

Illustrated by Frank R. Paul. (First published on Amazing Stories, 1927)

Enchantress of Lemuria

by Stanton A. Coblentz

80

Will Claybrook invented a means of seeing deep into the earth—and saw an incredible city far underground; and an incredibly lovely girl too (♫). Also included on paperback Hollow Earth Tales. Volume 3.

Illustrated by Robert Fuqua. (First published on Amazing Stories, 1941)

The Far Detour

by Arthur J. Burks

146

There, in what seemed solid rock, Gregg Pettis saw the figures of a man and a woman beckoning him . . . and found—Atlantis! Also included on paperback Hollow Earth Tales. Volume 4.

Illustrated by Damon Knight. (First published on Science Fiction Quarterly, 1942)

The Troglodytes

by Fred M. Barclay

208

These “men” covered with scales, with high technological advancement; seemed friendly at first . . . Also included on paperback Hollow Earth Tales. Volume 5.

Illustrated by Leo Morey. (First published in Amazing Stories, 1930)

Front cover by Robert Fuqua, illustrating a scene from Enchantress of Lemuria.

HOLLOW EARTH TALES



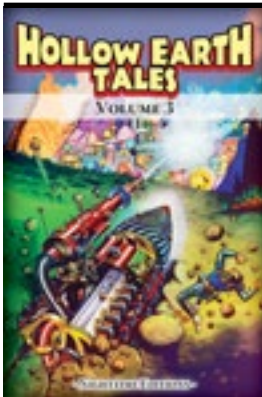
VOLUME 1:

- The Plunge of the “Knpfen” by *Leonard Grover*
- The Smoky God by *Willis George Emerson*
- The Annihilator Comes by *Ed Earl Repp*
- The Strange Voyage of Dr. Penwing by *Richard O. Lewis*
- The Hollow Planet by *Don Wilcox*
- The Voice from the Inner World by *A. Hyatt Verrill*
- The Underground City by *Bertrand L. Shurtleff*



VOLUME 2:

- A Subterranean Adventure by *George Paul Bauer*
- The Eye of Balamok by *Victor Rousseau*
- Death Dives Deep by *Paul Ernst*
- The Incredible Theory of Dr. Penwing by *Richard O. Lewis*



VOLUME 3:

- The Hidden World by *Edmond Hamilton*
- The Inner World by *A. Hyatt Verrill*
- Enchantress of Lemuria by *Stanton A. Coblentz*



VOLUME 4:

- Luvium by *A. R. McKenzie*
- Luvium, Under the Sand by *A. R. McKenzie*
- Luvium, The Invincible City by *A. R. McKenzie*
- The Far Detour by *Arthur J. Burks*
- The Valley of Titans by *L. A. Eshbach*



VOLUME 5:

- The Troglydites by *Fred M. Barclay*
- The Tomb of Time by *Richard Tooker*
- The Land of the Changing Sun by *William N. Harben*

VOLUME 6:
Coming Soon!

FOREWORD

From the theory . . .

Stories about underground worlds seem to be almost as old as humanity, but it was in late 17th century when Edmond Halley suggested the idea of a hollow earth as a scientific theory. Later on, more scientists, or pseudo scientists, would argue that the earth is hollow and most probably inhabited, the most important figure being John Cleves Symmes Jr., who, in 1918 introduced the concept of openings in the poles, he would later publish a novel titled ‘Symzonia; Voyage of Discovery’ to promote his ideas under the penname of Adam Seaborn. Other important contribution to this theory are William Reed with his 1909 book ‘The Phantom of the Poles’; Marshall B. Gardner with ‘A Journey to the Earth’s Interior’ (1920) and Cyrus Reed Teed with ‘The Cellular Cosmogony’ (1922) in which he claimed we are actually living *inside* the earth.

. . . To the fiction

Parallel to these scientific claims came works of early science fiction using the idea of the hollow earth or large cave systems like Ludvig Holberg’s 1741 novel ‘Nicolai Niels Klim’s Underground Travels’, the aforementioned ‘Symzonia; Voyage of Discovery’ (1820), John Uri Lloyd’s ‘Etidorhpa,’ (1897), Bulwer Lytton’s ‘Vril, The Power of the Coming Race,’ (1871) Edgar Rice Burroughs’ Pellucidar series (1914) and the famous Jules Verne’s ‘Journey to the center of the earth’ (1864), among others.

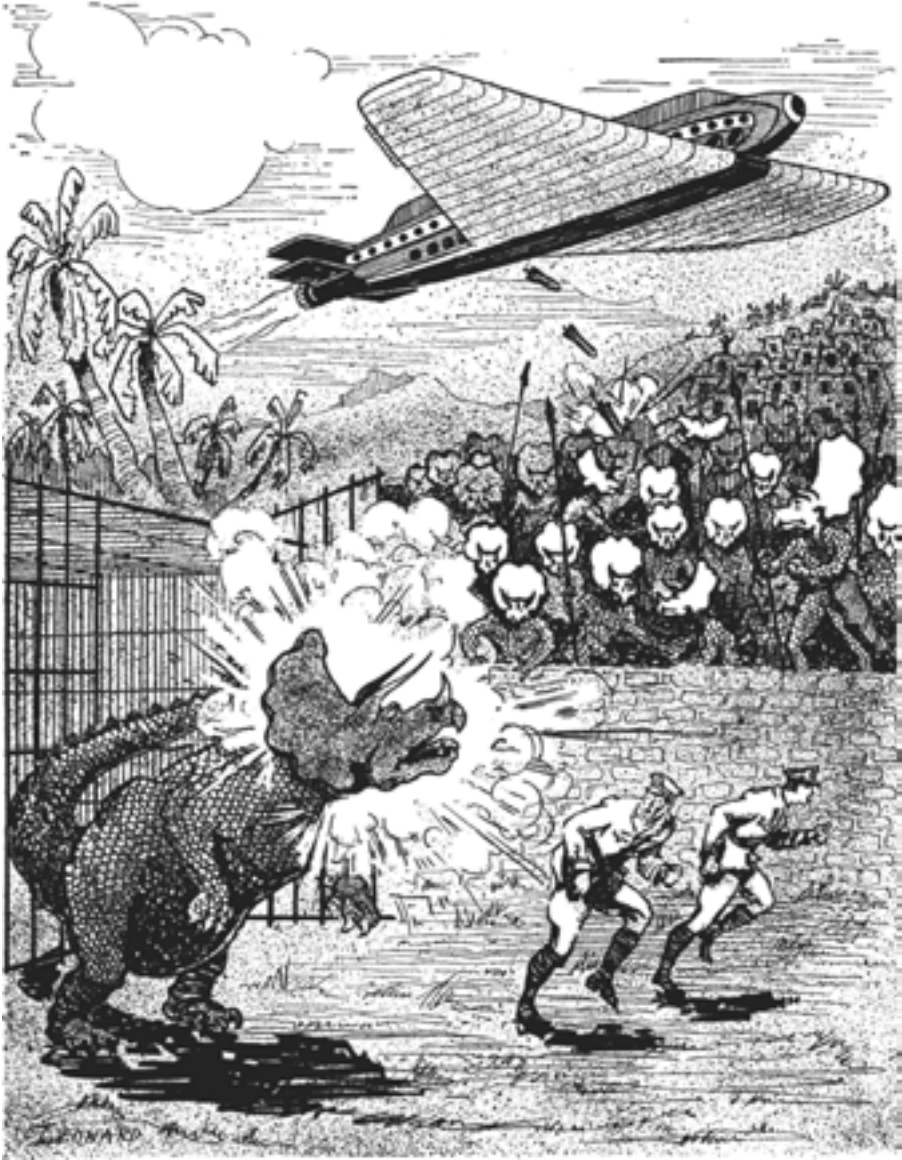
All these works and more are usually searchable and easily found on an on line search or listed in books on the subject, but there is a period of “hollow earth/subterranean fiction” that seems to be most obscure and hard to find, that is the stories published in the American pulp era magazines. This anthology focuses mostly on those years between 1910’s and 1950’s where many fascinating stories are easy to miss among so much mass-produced literature. Only a few exceptions were made.

I hope you enjoy these tales as much as I did searching, reading them and forming this collection. In them you’ll find all sort of speculations of hollow and cavern worlds, in the fast and entertaining style of the pulps.

Editor.

THE ANNIHILATOR COMES

By Ed Earl Repp



CHAPTER I

A NEW SHIP

IT did not take Lieutenant Robert Allison long to recover from the injuries he had received during the fateful maiden flight of the United States airship *Annihilator* when it was caught in the grip of a deadly Rocky Mountain up-draft, and whisked upward so that it resisted the gravitational pull of the Earth.

Perhaps the most effective curative that had brought him around to normal after some weeks of convalescence in the base hospital at Rode well Field, San Diego, was the almost constant presence of Joan Holdon. With her father, she had moved to San Diego from Denver, and taken up residence in the Lindbergh Aero-Hotel, just to be near him.

For many hours Allison had hovered between life and death after the *Annihilator* was rescued from the air-streams beyond gravity [*] by the genius of Professor Stilsen. For hours each day Joan had sat at his bedside and watched the man of her choice emerge from oblivion and gradually regain the bloom of health.

Then had come a day when attending physicians pronounced him completely recovered. His crushed ribs had knitted together and he had fought off the terrible effects of his tragic experiences.

Now, with Joan at his side, he walked through the hospital ward containing some of the *Annihilator's* convalescing crew and bade them good-bye. At the end of the hall a white-capped nurse was waiting for him, smiling.

"Well, Lieutenant, we're glad to see you in health again," she said "You've been such a good patient that we'll all miss you. How do you feel, sir?"

She tapped her hand with a red, white and blue envelope and regarded him with a trained eye.

"Fine. Miss Hale!" he replied, enthusiastically. "Couldn't be better! In fact I feel a hundred per cent better now than I did before the accident Thanks to everyone here! But I'm mighty glad to be loose again!"

"I don't doubt it, Lieutenant." the nurse smiled "Hospitals are one thing and freedom is another. It's hard to keep you flyers penned up for long. Here's a telegram that just arrived for you, sir."

She handed him the colored envelope and he tore it open excitedly. He knew it was from the government. Its color told him that and more. It had

[*] A reference to the story "Beyond Gravity." (1929) by Ed. Earl Repp. Not included in this collection due to not having anything "hollow earth" related.

come from the Aviation Division, Department of War. He read it quickly and handed it to Joan, his brows clouding.

*"Lieutenant Robert Allison,
Base Hospital, Rockwell Field,
San Diego, California.*

The War Department has this day commissioned you to command the Annihilator II. Ship will be ready for flight ten days from date. Report to Chief Commander Bartley at Kitty Hawk within ten days of your discharge from hospital for further orders. Congratulations and regards

*Secretary Aviation Division
War Department, USA"*

"Why, Bob!" Joan cried gleefully "you've been promoted! That's wonderful! Just think of commanding another ship like the *Annihilator*."

"But I had not expected the commission nor an order to report for duty so soon, Joan," he said, frowning. "I was hoping for an extended furlough until our plans materialized, at least. I don't like the idea, dear. It means that we'll have to postpone . . ."

"Oh, come on, Bob!" she said. "Our plans can wait until after you've reported. Perhaps we'll have the wedding ceremony at Kitty Hawk instead of here."

"I know, Joan," he insisted, "but what's a wedding without a honeymoon?"

She pulled at his sleeve mischievously and smiled into his face despite a tear that formed in her own eyes causing them to glisten like minute diamonds.

"The United States Government waits for no man. Robert!" she said "The wheels of war and conquest move despite the joys and sorrows of those concerned. You'll have to move with them. I'll be content to wait. We'll still leave our future to look forward to, beloved. Delay will make our marriage sweeter!"

"I guess you're right, Joan," he said, resignedly. "We'll have to wait unless this order is just a preliminary one, I hope it is, and that I can return at once following my formal installation in command. I'm so stunned over it all that I can't think clearly!"

"It's wonderful," Joan repeated. "Just think! They'll be saluting you as Commander Allison now, Robert!"

She stepped off a few paces and stood at attention. She brought her right hand upward in a stiff salute.

"I salute the commander of the great *Annihilator II*," she said, impulsively "And I pray that she will have better luck than her unfortunate sister who now lies buried in the . . ."

"Scrap yard!" he cut in, smiling and pulling her to him. "But let's forget

about ships and scrap yards, Joan, and enjoy my few days of liberty together! You never can tell what the future holds for a flyer! Who knows, they might send the *Annihilator* around the world or on some other wild goose chase, the reason for which nobody, not even the War Department, knows!"

"Well, if they do, Robert," Joan said as they walked out of the hospital building, "you stay away from those Rocky Mountain up-drafts! I don't want you to get beyond gravity again. Perhaps you wouldn't come out so fortunately as you did this time!"

Holden Gives Advice

Commander Allison, his blue eyes flashing with happiness, followed Joan into her trim little aero-speedster with its transparent hummer wings, and sat down beside her. She tested the controls, stepped on the starter and shot the craft upward in a perpendicular ascent, its helicopters droning like miniature windmills. It hovered in mid-air for a moment while she turned on the pulling duals. Singing screws earned the craft as swiftly and gracefully as a humming-bird toward San Diego which lay across the bay.

She looked downward upon Rockwell Field. It lay serene and calm with its brood of government planes. A few short weeks before, it had been the scene of much activity and apprehension, with the partially destroyed hulk of the *Annihilator* hanging above it in the grip of Professor Stilsen's magnetic drums which had coated her out of the distant heavens with her cargo of dying men. Joan shuddered, recalling certain scenes in which the man by her side had figured. She pictured them carrying his still, bloody form from the wreckage. There had been others, too, many others, who had not survived the ordeal and now lay under white crosses on the summit of Point Loma. A tear coursed down her cheek and she sought Bob's hand with trembling fingers.

"God has been good, Robert," she said. "Good to both of us. He saved your life for me"

He stared at her blankly for an instant and then nodded, glancing downward. "I can imagine how you felt, Joan, when they carried me out of the wreck," he said, "It's odd that I should survive, hurt as I was, while others went West. Oh, well it's all in the game of life. One fellow gets off while the other stands the gaff."

She squeezed his arm affectionately and concentrated on the controls. Straight ahead loomed the Lindbergh Aero-Hotel, rising into the heavens like a great, towering obelisk. Above it, swarmed hundreds of craft, darting hither and yon like so many flies whose wings scintillated under the glare of a warm sun.

Joan cut her forward motors and whirled the helicopters for a vertical de-

scent onto the flat top of the sky-scraper. The little aero-speedster hovered and then dropped slowly. They hurried to the Holdon suite on a lower floor.

In the Holdon rooms, Joan's father nursed and cursed a cold in the head. When Joan and Bob arrived there, his valet was placing a bowl of mustard-water under his feet. Mr Holdon was wrapped in a blanket and swearing softly under his breath.

"Dang this danged cold!" he was growling. "I'm the damndest . . . wauchew-w-w! . . . unluckiest critter in forty-eight states! Who the devil said yon can't catch a cold in San Diego! Ouch! Get away from here you grinning baboon! That water's too danged hot!"

"I'm sorry, sir!" said the valet. "You asked for it hot, sir."

"I don't care what I asked for, you damned idiot!" he snorted "C-c-cool . . . wauchew' . . . it! Of all the blankety-blank . . ."

"Why, daddy Joan said, remonstrating. She and Bob had been standing just inside the door regarding the afflicted man as he sat in front of an open fireplace. "Aren't you ashamed to use such language!"

He looked up, his nose the color of a sun-reddened plum, his eyes as watery as his lips were colorless. Ex-Congressman Holdon always was subject to colds in the head and he was suffering one now in the act of becoming acclimated to San Diego's semi-tropical warmth—a decided change from the chill of the Rocky Mountain region whence he came.

"No, I'm not ashamed" he grumbled "This old damn cold is driving me crazy. The blankety-blank . . . oh, hell! What's the use!"

"Well yon might have a little respect for me, daddy," said Joan "And besides, I don't want Bob Allison to learn such talk.

"Good Lord, Joan," he gasped, "don't tell me you're going to make a ninny out of Bob Allison"

"I'm not going to do that, daddy," she said, "but I'm not going to let you teach him your whole vocabulary either. I brought him home with me and he's got some big news to tell you while I dress for dinner!"

Commander Bob Allison walked from his obscurity into the room, and Mr. Holdon rose to greet him.

"Bob," he said, nodding to the valet to remove the bowl of mustard-water "How do you feel, my boy?"

"Exceptional, Mr Holdon." Bob nodded, taking the elder man's proffered hand. "Feel great! Sorry to see you in such bad shape."

"Me? Hump! I get a cold in the head every day before breakfast!" Holdon growled. "I'll be all right in a day or two, I'm mighty glad to see you, Robert! You know your father and I have been friends since we went to school and I sure have worried about you."

"Oh, I'm all right now. Mr Holdon," said Bob "I wired dad at Washington, telling him I've been turned loose and commissioned to command the sister ship of the *Annihilator*"

"Command what?"

"Just as I was leaving the hospital, I received an official telegram stating that the War Department has promoted me to commanding rank, I'm to command the *Annihilator II*, Mr Holdon!"

"So that's the big news Joan hinted at, eh?"

"That's it, sir. but I wish they'd have waited until after Joan and I had had time to . . ."

"Get married, eh, Bobby?" Holdon interjected

"Well, we sort of planned that, sir" Bob stammered, his face reddening. Joan's father was searching his eyes with a penetrating look. He straightened abruptly and projected his palm again.

"That's damn fine, Bob!" He said. "So you've tamed that little wildcat, eh?"

"Tamed her?" Bob said. "No, it's the other way around, sir. She tamed me from the first."

Mr. Holdon laughed and sneezed and swore. He leaned closer to the son of his old friend, Senator Allison, and whispered guardedly.

"Well, here's a little advice. Bob," he said, winking. "Don't let her tame you too far, or she'll run over you like she has done to me! I've been a victim to her every whim, Robert. Make her eat out of your hand. You can do it!"

* * *

Time passed swiftly, perhaps too swiftly for Commander Bob Allison and Joan Holdon. They spent five delightful days taking in the sights offered by beautiful San Diego, the great metropolis of the southwest. And many leisure hours were spent under the spreading boughs of the Spanish willows in Balboa Park.

Meanwhile, Bob's strength rapidly returned. Each day he took his exercises, and Joan, with a sudden desire for the strenuous motions, joined him. Together they went through the routines in the modern gymnasium in the Lindbergh Aero-Hotel. Delightful hours spent at Mission Beach and at Coronado caused Bob's pallor to flee and a deep tan to take its place.

Then the day arrived for the flight from San Diego to Kitty Hawk across the continent, in Joan's little hummer plane. They took off on a bright morning and by midday were winging through Middle Western skies in well-established air lanes. Overhead raced the giant leviathans of aerial commerce. Great freighters laden with cargo, luxurious liners filled with passengers, scudded in all directions through the air.

It was the year 1980 and aviation had grown to far greater proportions

than had been predicted in the earlier days of flying years before, railroad-ing had been abandoned as slow and unprofitable, and the transportation companies had hurled themselves wholeheartedly into the field of aerial transportation. The world demanded speed and got it.

Bob watched a huge leviathan of the upper reaches scudding westward at a terrific clip. It looked like some gigantic kite racing through the heavens, unleashed, before a driving gale. The muffled roar of its giant screws reached their ears like the throb of thunder as it passed high overhead. It was one of the new liners recently put into the air by the Globe Circum-vention Company, and was headed from the Atlantic coast to the Orient without a single stop. Quickly it vanished and those in Joan's plane turned to other interesting sights that marked their journey across the country.

CHAPTER II

A DANGEROUS MISSION

CHIEF Commander Bartley, stormy old petrel of the Kitty Hawk Division, American Air Forces, looked up from a pile of papers that lay upon the desk in his private sanctum at the "catbird air yards," and scowled. Around him sat a group of hard-faced young men, making up the commanding personnel of the *Annihilator II*. He waved a tri-colored paper over his head, glared at Commander Allison and swore under his breath at the others.

"Look at this, gentlemen," he snapped loudly. "Look at this. Here's an order from Washington detailing the *Annihilator* to the North Pole to investigate the disappearance of a bunch of Swedes who went there looking for a place to plant their flag. For the life of me, gentlemen, I can't understand some of the crazy orders that come from those nincompoops behind roll top desks at Washington! Now they order me to send the *Annihilator* to the pole when they know full well that she has not undergone her final tests! The bureaucratic idiots! It is my honest opinion that some of those men over us ought to be holding down muckers' jobs instead of responsible positions where they can sling men's lives around like so much ballast!

"Look at the *Annihilator*! That's the result of Washington's orders! Rankin would not have taken the ship through the up-draft region had he not been instructed to do so through me by those nincompoops at the Capitol! Now I've got to send you boys out to look for a needle in the haystack just because the Swedish Government has asked us to search for its crazy explorers. It's hell, gentlemen . . ."

While Chief Commander Bartley glowered and hovered perilously close to the brink of insubordination, Commander Allison, looking as clean-cut and trim in his new uniform as a tailor's model, bit his lip abstractedly. Like all of the officers of the air forces, he understood the seeming inefficiency of some of the internal bureaus through which they were subject to many inconsiderate orders. But Commander Bob Allison was not thinking of bureaucratic nincompoops. He was thinking of those poor devils lost in the desolate wastes of the vast, worthless regions under the northern lights, and of Joan.

He had not expected to be sent with the *Annihilator* to such an out of the way place, with the date of his wedding drawing so near. What would Joan think about it? He wondered if he ought to resign his command and go to her, letting someone else worry about polar blasts, ice-fields and arctic blizzards. He might be gone for months . . . might never return. Men have been lost forever in the arctic, even as the Swedes probably were now. Few ships, air or water, had been built to stand the strain.

But Bob Allison was not the kind of a man to quit in the face of peril. Deep within him, he felt an urge of adventure, the old flame which had drawn him into aviation from his early youth. He decided that Joan would have to wait until he returned. But the thought irked him and finally he cast it out of his mind, burying it in thoughts of personal duty to mankind. The lost creatures were men, flesh and blood like himself, and were therefore deserving of the respect of their fellows.

"Well, Commander," he said rising stiffly to attention, "I await your orders, sir! We shall start at your command, sir!"

Chief Commander Bartley, scowling into the papers on his desk, lifted his eyes and surveyed his subordinate, frowning; then pounded his fist on the arm of his chair.

"I've a damned good notion to wire those idiots in Washington to go plumb to hell, commander!" he growled blackly. "But it would do no good! You'd have to go anyhow or . . . resign, sirrah!"

"I had no thoughts of resigning, sir," Bob lied glibly. "In fact, I'd welcome the chance to put the *Annihilator* through such a rigid test . . ."

"You would, eh?" the old man snorted, calming. "You would, sirrah?"

"Yes sir!" Bob saluted stiffly.

"Then by God you can go right ahead and do it!" the Chief Commander snapped, his eyes flashing with a trace of admiration for this newly installed officer. "But if you never get as far as the North Pole or even the Arctic Circle, don't tell me about it! Thank God I'm not responsible for you, gentlemen. Good-luck and good-day, sirrahs!"

For several days the world's presses and televisions had told the world

a graphic tale of tragedy at the northern extremities of the earth. Twenty Swedish explorers had gone to the north polar regions a year before to hunt for a new and undiscovered land under the aurora.

They had set out from Skjangli near the northwestern frontier of Norway, expecting to return in the spring of the next year. The Swedish government had graciously turned over to them one of its finest scientifically equipped airliners, and they had set out to establish an operation base on Markham Island, the northernmost outpost of Greenland on the fringe of the Lincoln Sea. From there they were to scour the polar regions in one of the most extensive explorations in the history of arctic conquest.

One day in the spring Sweden had received word that its scientists had ended their research and that the liner was heading back toward Skjangli with very important information and new land for the nation that had made the exploration possible. Radio-television, mounted in the R-T room of the liner, informed the world that a very startling discovery had been made. But details were lacking, probably because the scientists withheld them until such times as the Swedish government decided to give out the news.

The Start!

That was all the world had ever heard from them. Then a frantic appeal had been sent out by Sweden asking the United States to help them rescue their scientists. Whether they had been grounded by a storm, nobody could tell, but that was generally conceded by American polar explorers to be the case. All agreed that their liner had crashed with tragic results, destroying lives and possibility of further communications.

It was a well-known fact that their provisions were perilously close to being exhausted. Two men, left at Markham Island, informed the world through a low wave radio-television broadcasting set, that their fellows would starve in less than thirty days unless help came to them. Just where the liner might be, the two men could not say, other than that the leader of the expedition had informed them that they were camped, before taking off to return home, at what they claimed was the real geographic North Pole, a spot which no known human being had ever located previously.

That bit of news caused many scientists to shake their heads incredulously, for during the years between 1935 and 1980, men had gone to the north and south polar regions and returned with what they declared were complete maps. How, then, at this late date, could the Swedish scientists discover some new land that did not exist on the allegedly accurate maps? Perhaps certain floes had melted; and it was quite unlikely, they believed, that a new land was revealed. At any rate, the men were lost and the *Annihilator* had been hurled into what Chief-Commander Bartley termed a mad search.

In consequence, Kitty Hawk suddenly became the scene of much activity. Men scurried hither and yon performing the duties incident to the taking off of the *Annihilator II* to search the arctic regions for twenty lost explorers. Elevators droned under the weight of provisions as foodstuffs and supplies were shot into its huge belly to be stored away for the officers, crews and additional men, should they locate the missing scientists.

Great stores of fuel, in the form of *crusite* powder for the ship's rocket driving exhausts, were placed in protected bunkers on the fuel decks. A thousand and one details had to be looked after in preparation for the first real flight of the sister ship of the destroyed *Annihilator I* in which Commander Bob Allison and hundreds of others had come so close to losing their lives.

Commander Allison, with a staff of alert, stiff-backed officers, attended to everything, supervising the loading of the supplies, arranging crews and what-not necessary for a polar flight. As an additional precaution against unforeseen polar dangers, the young commander invited several American scientists and explorers to accompany them. His request for scientific help was immediately granted when he asked Chief-Commander Bartley to make his desires known in Washington.

Kitty Hawk was in fever heat. Every minute of time was needed. When the ship was ready, newspaper men with cameras and television-news operators were on hand to pay glowing tribute to the *Annihilator II* and its commanding officers. Commander Bob Allison received his share of the publicity, though he cared little for it. He was, to begin with, a great hero who had fought to the last to keep the *Annihilator I* from being pulled into the distant skies beyond the influence of gravity while in the grip of the deadly up-draft near Denver. All this was recalled by newspapermen. With it went the news that he had been given the rank of commander and would have full charge of the *Annihilator II*.

Then Commander Allison stood on the enclosed bridge just over the control cabin in the *Annihilator's* geometrically-shaped nose and gave orders for the take off. Far below him he caught a glimpse of Joan and her father standing on the fringe of an excited crowd. Her face was hidden behind a handkerchief, but her father was appraising the ship intently.

Allison felt a pang of remorse when he looked down upon his betrothed. She had not objected to his going to the North Pole or anywhere. Instead, she had urged him to do his duty, vowing to wait for him until the sun sank forever. But he wondered, as the *Annihilator* rose vertically, if he would be as fortunate in returning to her this time as he had been from the disastrous flight of the craft's sister-ship.

Northward Bound.

Outwardly, there was little difference in the appearance of the *Annihilator II* and that of her junked sister. But internally, the new craft had incorporated many radical changes and improvements including up-to-the-minute devices in case of a repetition of the former craft's destruction. Science had learned many things in the meantime.

Where the destroyed craft had been built to nullify gravity only to a certain degree, the *Annihilator II* was capable of almost entirely overcoming the earth's gravitational influence. Had this been within the power of the former ship, the disaster might not have occurred, for she could have gone above the air-streams that had held her, and returned to earth at will. As it was, she could repel gravity only up to a certain altitude, then hover under its influence, unable to rise further. But when government scientists and engineers had finished the *Annihilator II*, they pronounced her capable of overcoming gravity to the extent that interplanetary travel was not at all beyond the realms of possibility. Through the installation of more powerful dynamos that supplied the electro-magnetic power for her great, cobalt-steel hull, she could rise to almost unlimited heights, falling away from the globe without interference from its gravitational forces. As a precaution against unforeseen obstacles in the generation of electro-magnetic power for gravity nullification, the *Annihilator II*, like her sister, contained a set of safety airfoils that extended outward from the hull. In the event that the forces within her that nullified gravity should suddenly or unexpectedly fail to operate, throwing the ship under the influence of the earth's pull, these airfoils could be utilized for gliding. But there was little fear of a disaster of this order, for the ship contained dual dynamos with one unit held always in reserve.

In the field of propulsion, the great ship departed abruptly from all others outside of her class. She contained a powerful rocket drive system, using *crusite* powder as fuel for the internal combustion chambers. This powder was fired in relays, creating a tremendous force that hurled the ship through the air as the spent gases were vented through a series of exhausts.

As for the remainder of the *Annihilator II*, she was precisely the same in general construction as her unfortunate sister ship. At the geometrical nose was the control cabin. Above this, surrounded by observation exposures of thick quartz, was the bridge from which the commanding officers sent their orders by radio-television to even the remotest corners of the craft. Now, as Commander Robert Allison stood on the bridge with a group of subordinates around him and watched the rapidly diminishing forms of the spectators, the *Annihilator II* shot swiftly skyward. Already the drive exhausts

were hissing with potent, thrusting energy, and, as she rose higher, dousing her hull in a bank of mists, she began to move northward.

At 60,000 feet, she was scarcely visible to those who stood upon the ground and watched her depart, held in breathless awe by the glorious sight. She emerged from the mists and the sun struck her broadside as the drive exhausts vomited long jets of blazing fire. Those on the ground saw her hull glisten in the sun. She hissed across the heavens like a meteor, gaining altitude as she went.

Commander Bob Allison stood at the radio-television broadcast and receiving set on the bridge of the *annihilator* and spoke calmly into the speaking piece. His voice and image were carried at once to the control room.

"Take her up to ninety thousand, Lieutenant!" he ordered. "Set your course due north for the geographic pole; then open her up!"

Lieutenant Berger, sitting calmly at the main control, peered into the calm features of Commander Allison in the oval television screen resting among the instruments on the board in front of him.

"Yes, sir," he nodded, smiling grimly, his features hard-set.

He moved slowly a small wheel that lay in the center of the control and regarded his instruments. The altimeter needle was turning swiftly to the right. He checked its readings mentally and then snapped the wheel into the 90,000 notch. The altimeter needle stopped at that altitude, quivering like an arrow imbedded in a wall. He cast a quick glance at a brother officer sitting at the reserve controls at his right and grinned.

"The old man seems to have lost some of his nerve since the crack-up of the old *Annihilator*, Cameron!" he said. "He doesn't seem to be his old reckless self. If the Bob Allison I used to know was in command of this ship, he'd send her to Mars to be sure of altitude!"

Lieutenant Cameron nodded.

"Maybe he wants to be careful this time," he said, studying his instruments. "I don't blame him if he's safety-minded."

"Neither do I, Lieutenant," said Berger, increasing the acceleration, "but he ought to take her up out of the rest of this atmospheric resistance!"

"He knows what he's doing," said Cameron "You ought to be glad that he's lost some of his old-time recklessness. I am, old sox! No need to take unnecessary chances."

"But I think he's lost his nerve, Lieutenant," Berger insisted. "We're losing time by flying in this resistance. He ought to take her up 30 miles at least! I'd like to get back home again. I've no stomach for this North Pole stuff!"

A Sudden Danger

But Commander Allison had not lost his nerve nor was he being unduly

cautious. His order to fly the *Annihilator* at the 90,000-foot altitude was quite justifiable in view of his desire to put her to a resistance test before going into the rarefied regions of space where friction diminishes so rapidly. He stood before the instrument panel on the bridge and studied the maze of dials, meters and levels that confronted him. His trained eyes read them rapidly and he turned to his next ranking officer.

"She cuts the air like an arrow, Bright!" He said, growing more pleased with the performance of the *Annihilator* with each passing moment. "I think she's going to prove to be a better ship than the old *Annihilator*!"

"She's doing fine, Commander," Lieutenant-Commander Bright nodded. "I'm anxious to see what she can turn up in the face of resistance."

"She's doing five hundred now, but she ought to increase that by half against friction," said Bob. "If she's got more velocity than the old ship, she ought to kick out about a thousand miles per hour."

"Dr. Shelton, head of the science department back at the cat-bird yards, said he thought she'd do better," said Bright, cocking an eye at his superior. "He gave her velocity in the rarefied regions as unlimited."

Bob nodded and gave an order into the speaking tubes of the ship's communication apparatus. Almost at once they felt the *Annihilator* lurch ahead under added force, and her speed increased swiftly until the dials indicated that she was clipping off 900 miles per hour flat. The velocity indicator paused there as the *Annihilator* raced northward, passed over the United States Capitol, left it behind like a white mound, and settled down to her great race to the pole.

In gradual ascents, she was lifted high above the commercial air lanes and gradually the details of the land below became only a blur. Then a blanket of mist shut out the earth for a time as completely as though it did not exist.

Commander Bob Allison remained at the instrument panel. Few orders were necessary now. Every man within the *Annihilator* knew his business and attended to it with regulation precision. Occasionally, Allison studied the jets of pale blue flame that shot from the craft's exhausts, hissing ominously like some prehistoric carnivorous reptile of the air. Then the mist cleared and he found himself staring down upon the towering obelisks of New York City. They looked like toothpicks stuck within a web of hair. He had given an order for the ship to swing a trifle east of its course to pass over Gotham. No time was lost; he wanted to give its seething millions the thrill of seeing the craft blazing through the upper reaches like a glistening needle. But New York passed almost suddenly out of sight and the *Annihilator's* nose was swung due north again.

As the Great Lakes stood under his feet like little puddles of water sur-

rounded by the snow-clad cities and open areas around them, Bob noticed a group of peculiar white lights, visible even in the light of mid-day, a few points off the port stream-lines. They seemed like tiny pin-points but were growing in size gradually and he looked quickly at the meteorometer. The needle was jerking spasmodically to port, and he gasped.

The growing lights were fire-balls and he calculated that, with the velocity of both the *Annihilator* and the celestial missiles, they would come into each other's right-of-way within two minutes. Instantly he grabbed the speaking tube and yelled into it tensely.

"Pull her down to a hundred thousand feet, Lieutenant," he snapped. "Fire-balls off the port!"

With a feeling of nausea in his vitals, he felt the *Annihilator* drop like an express elevator. A rapidly approaching roar told him that the blazing missiles were coursing overhead to smash into the Earth somewhere or continue on around it. He seemed to feel the electromagnetic energy surging through the *Annihilator's* cobalt-steel hull, and the falling sensation ceased slowly. She had dropped out of the path of the missiles and was coursing northward again in the heavier atmospheres.

Commander Allison might have turned all the details of direction over to his staff and taken himself to the comfort of his own well-appointed cabin, but he preferred to remain on the bridge. He did not believe himself any more capable of handling the flight than any of the others of his staff, yet he derived certain pleasure from standing on the bridge of his very own command to see that every detail was carried out to the perfection that made the United States Air Forces supreme the world over. Being the young man that he was, there were particular thrills in the flight that held him tensely at the instrument board, occasionally watching the snow-clad world below him pass by.

Finally, he issued the order for the craft to rise again to the fifty-mile altitude. She went up rapidly as the gravity repellent shot through the hull. He watched the scenes below merge into a jumbled nothing. Clouds and mists, storms of snow and rain surged below, finally hiding the earth entirely.

CHAPTER III

THE DESERTED MEN

THE Hudson Bay, according to the ship's instruments, lay under the *Annihilator*. Bob checked his charts and with a pencil marked the course. In another hour the *Annihilator*, under her present velocity

of 1500 miles per hour, would be across Canada and the Northwest Territories. Then she would be entering the desolate wastes of the far north. From then on, a close watch must be maintained for traces of the lost explorers.

Thin coatings of frost had already begun to mar the quartz in the observation panels. Inside the *Annihilator* it was as warm as toast, the heat coming from a ventilation system which carried warmth from the hot combustion chambers. The officers had long since removed their "monkey suits" with fur-lined interiors, and were comfortable enough in the trim jackets, boots and breeches of their respective ranks.

Commander Bob felt a sudden impulse to communicate with the two men the Swedish explorers had left behind at their base on Markham Island. He picked up the speaking piece of the ship's communication instruments and got in touch with the radio-television operator, ordering him to communicate at once with the two men to learn if any word had come from the lost scientists.

The operator called the commander presently and Bob had a glimpse of a haggard face in the bridge television screen. The fellow wore a long beard that almost completely hid his worn features. He was blowing blasts of steam from his lips as he spoke. He looked like some shaggy brute, savage and ready to snap.

"Markham Island?" Bob inquired, staring at the man's features. The fellow answered in fairly good English.

"Yes, sir!" he said "Markham Island operation headquarters, Swedish Polar Expedition."

"Any word from the lost men?" Bob asked. Lieutenant-Commander Bright looked over his shoulder into the screen.

"I've picked up some faulty messages that I could not understand, Commander," the shaggy one said, breathing excitedly. "I don't know where they come from, but my direction indicator pointed toward the polar cap. I thought I caught my name mentioned, but it might have come from one of the rescue ships already on the field."

"Oh, then others have beat us?"

"Our government has had several planes and ships in the vicinity for weeks, sir," he said "The *Annihilator* is the first alien craft to appear. Have you got any medicine aboard, sir?"

"Yes, why?" asked Bob.

"My partner is down flat with pneumonia and I can do nothing for him," the man groaned. "I'm all alone and not feeling any too well myself."

"We'll drop a serum to you on our way over," Bob said.

"That's fine, sir," the man at the outpost smiled, "But can't you pick us up instead?"

"I think it best for you to remain where you are, mister," Bob asserted "Your men might communicate with you. I can't spare a relief. You'll be all right."

"But I'll go insane staying here alone! My partner is raving."

"I might pick him up, but you'll have to stay," Bob insisted. "We'll take you on later . . . in a couple of days if not before. But say, what the devil's wrong with your face? What are those red marks under your eyes?"

The man gasped and ran a nervous hand over his exposed cheek bones.

"Red marks?" he said, weirdly. "My God! Have I got it?"

"Got what?" Bob snapped

Lieutenant-Commander Bright nudged Bob and whispered

"The man's got small-pox, Commander!" he said. "Bet his partner is down with it."

Then the man spoke again.

"I might as well tell you, sir," he said, "that my partner is down with small-pox! He must've got it from a band of Esquimaux that passed by here a week ago. We bought some walrus blubber from 'em!"

"Then I'm mighty sorry, old timer," Bob said softly, "that we can't pick either of you up. But we'll drop medicines and serums for you. Hard luck! It's against orders to take on anything like that. Stand by to pick up the delivery!"

Commander Allison swung from the screen and picked up an intercommunication tube. He pressed a button beside the oval screen and waited for the hospital attendant to answer. The medico's face appeared almost at once

"Prepare a chest of small-pox serums to be dropped overboard at once, doctor Bob ordered crisply. "Have it delivered immediately to the bridge!"

The *Annihilator* turned her nose slightly north by northeast across the Arctic Archipelago known as the Parry Islands, and headed for Markham Island, lying off the northernmost extremities of Greenland. She opened her exhausts and pressed against a head-on gale that was sweeping down upon her in a terrific blast. For a half hour she shot across the bleak wastes scarcely more than 40,000 feet up; then she dropped down to 20,000.

The Arctic Ocean was frozen over and covered with snow. There was not a sight of land to be had from any side; the whole thing looked like a great field of ice, packed and caked into a rugged, awe-inspiring mass. Eagle-eyed observers, standing on the warm bridge, studied the scene under and before the *Annihilator's* nose through powerful telescopes for a glimpse of a snow-clad shack.

Allison Decides

It was a difficult undertaking, even through telescopes, to find a tiny ice-covered hut nestling snugly on a bleak, white world. And the added interference of a howling blizzard served to increase the observers' apprehension and their growing doubts of locating the outpost which contained two suffering remnants of a once seemingly indomitable scientific expedition. But finally it was spotted, mapped and logged. From a 1,000 foot altitude the shack looked like a tiny square of dirty white standing out in base relief from the general surface of the ice fields. Smoke from a chimney had showered the roof with a smudge breaking the monotony of endless whiteness.

The *Annihilator* slowed its velocity, circled over the hut at a low elevation and whirled its sirens. Almost at once a fur-clad figure emerged from it, shielded his face from the blasts of snow and ice and cutting winds, and looked up. Then he waved his arms wildly, insanely.

Commander Allison watched him standing below, waist-deep in snow, and felt a pang of pity for him. The two men must have suffered untold agonies of privation here on this bleak, snow-swept island, and now one was down with small-pox; the other threatening to drop at any moment. He looked at the medicine chest lying on the floor of the bridge waiting for some hand to drop it through the life-saving chute which yawned under a beryllium hatch-covering. Undoubtedly both men would die even with medicines, before they might return. It was certain that the man standing in the blizzard would go down. Then without help they would both die of starvation if not from the ravages of the dread disease.

Bob's features suddenly became hard and his eyes flashed decisively. He shot an order into the tubes and turned to the warrant officer "Rogers," he snapped, "have the chief quartermaster send out a land party to bring in the two men! See that they are inoculated beforehand. Have the two men from the hut placed in solitary confinement and have Doctor Riorden attend to them!"

"Yes, sir!" the man saluted, striding swiftly to the speaking tubes.

The *Annihilator* settled slowly toward the ice, one of her great airfoils sheltering the tiny hut that lay under it. There was a general scurry of activity in all quarters as men were detailed to bring in the afflicted men. From the bridge, Bob and his staff watched the man dancing joyously in the snow. He turned to Lieutenant-Commander Bright and swore.

"It's against orders. Bright!" he said, "but I'll be damned if I'll leave those poor devils here to die! I can't see how they can spread the disease if measures are taken to prevent it."

"Amen!" said Bright "It would be a rotten crime to let 'em rot without

help! It's a white man's act, sir, to take 'em aboard. But what about a relief? Are you leaving the radio station in the hut unattended?"

"No, I'm going to ask for two volunteers from our radio-television crew, and let them take care of the outpost until we fly over again," Bob said curtly. He turned to the warrant officer again.

"Rogers," he said, "have your R-T crew report to me at once!"

While Warrant Officer Rogers was relaying his orders, Bob watched the outpost attendant fighting madly through the snow to reach the *Annihilator*. He stumbled many times, got up weakly, and struggled onward. Then a squad of men from the *Annihilator* was seen plunging toward him. He collapsed in the snow just as they reached his side, and was placed upon a stretcher and earned out of sight. The remainder of the squad continued on to the hut and vanished within it. They emerged presently carrying a still form.

Commander Allison turned away to appraise a group of R-T men lined at attention on the bridge.

"Men," he said, "bringing those two scientists aboard has left the outpost unattended. It is important that it be kept open in case the lost men try to communicate with it by radio, I want two volunteers to relieve them until we determine whether or not the lost members of the expedition live. Who will remain behind?"

Instantly the entire group stepped forward. As one man. they all volunteered, despite the fact that none of them harbored a genuine desire to be left like ice-particles on the vast, unknown, frozen wastes.

Commander Bob Allison, knowing many of the operators personally, expected just such a move. He chose two. The men saluted with pleasure.

"That's fine, boys!" he said, temporarily shunning the dignity of his rank and striding forward "It won't be for long, men! Good luck to you both."

The men shook hands and were dismissed. At the companionway leading from the bridge down to the main promenade deck, one turned and waved. The youthful commander nodded and returned the salute.

As a precaution against the spreading of the disease, every man on board the *Annihilator* who had not been recently vaccinated, was subjected to an inoculation of small-pox serum. Then the *Annihilator* rose a thousand feet and began a slow ziz-zagging course toward the geographic north pole.

Was it a Dream?

The blizzard increased in fury until the wind shrieked along the streamlined hull of the *Annihilator*, drowning the moaning hiss of her exhausts. Particles of ice smashed against the observation exposures and the going had to be slow to maintain a close lookout for traces of the lost explorers.

At times the craft was sent so low that her glistening, frost-coated bottom scarcely cleared the jagged ice that piled high in mountainous shapes on the great ice field, they eventually came upon a snowed-in Esquimaux town. The craft paused, shrieked its sirens, and went on after a reasonable delay. There were no white men in the little circle of igloo huts; there was nothing to indicate even that life existed in the ice-clad town. But those on board the *Annihilator* knew that the inhabitants were content to remain within their mound shaped dwellings, protected against the terrible blasts that swept down upon them from the North. Had white men been there, they would have exposed themselves at the first whining sound of the *Annihilator's* ear-splitting sirens.

The great airship swept over the desolate wastes at a velocity of little more than fifty miles per hour now. Only one of her exhausts belched a throttled stream of flame. Below, the scenes remained unchanged. Vast fields of unbroken desolation lay on every hand, staring lifelessly at the leviathan of the air.

Gradually the blizzard subsided as the *Annihilator* cruised steadily northward in sweeping zig-zags. Tense observers stood on the bridge and studied every mile as it passed by but they saw nothing but occasional wolves, great, scraggy creatures that almost merged with the harmony of the north. One pack, hunger-crazed, raced over the ice under the ship for miles, like sharks following in the wake of a doomed vessel.

Crews were changed with clock-like regularity in the *Annihilator*. but Bob Allison remained on the bridge for a long time. Suddenly one of the men yelled jubilantly and pointed downward. Bob grabbed a glass and studied what appeared to be the wreck of an airplane partially covered with snow, the tip of an airfoil showing and a tail sticking up in the air at a sharp angle. He observed a thin wisp of smoke curling upward from the wreckage.

Instantly the *Annihilator* shut off her exhaust and hovered, finally settling on the ice beside the wrecked plane. All hands were turned to at once, and the plane was surrounded by a group of eager men but to the intense chagrin and disappointment of the *Annihilator's* officers and crew, it was discovered that only one man out of the plane's crew of eight was living! They found him squatting, half-frozen, before a small fire fueled from the wreckage. The others lay dead around him, stark proof of the failure of one of the Swedish rescue planes that had set out to find their brothers.

The man's features were ghastly. Pieces of flesh hung down from beneath his eyes, cracked off by the killing frost and cold. His fingers and toes were black, dead things, and had to be amputated in the *Annihilator's* surgical chamber. The dead men were buried in holes dug in the ice and covered

with the motors of the plane as a precaution against the predatory creatures of the polar wilds.

Following the discovery of the unfortunate rescue party, Commander Allison sought the solace of his cabin, undressed and retired. But he had no more than gotten well to sleep, it seemed to him, than he was awakened by Lieutenant-Commander Bright. The ship's barometers had fallen to zero, creating alarm and apprehension among the officers who were aware of what the drop in the recording of the storm instruments meant.

But what held Commander Allison's eyes riveted ahead was a vast body of water, open and free from ice. It was rolling gently like some great inland lake. He turned presently and studied his charts, suspecting that the *Annihilator's* speed had been increased during the night, taking her well away from the north polar regions. But he was amazed to learn that she was flying as slowly as before, and was over the geographic pole!

He looked again at the rolling body of water, rubbing his eyes. Had he suddenly been transferred in his dreams to some strange magical land? A great bird, with a wing-spread of a dozen feet, flapped across his vision toward the distant horizon. Was it possible that such a bird could be flying serenely over the North Pole? But there it was, nevertheless, and those on board the *Annihilator* were stunned by its sudden, unexpected appearance.

CHAPTER IV

THE POLE OR THE TROPICS

PROFESSOR Marble, head of the division of vertebrate mammals of the Johnsonian Institution, stood beside Commander Allison. On the other side of him was Dr. Ralston of the same institution, from which the government recruited its staff of scientists to accompany the *Annihilator*. They were studying the bird through powerful glasses. They saw it hover on the horizon for an instant and then dive suddenly out of sight.

"That was a species of bird that has long since been extinct, to our knowledge," Professor Marble exclaimed "It was a pterodactyl or I'm as crazy as a loon!"

"Pterodactyl is correct, professor!" agreed Dr. Ralston "Mighty strange, but correct. I can't believe it!"

"But what about this body of water, gentlemen?" Bob asked blankly "My charts don't show any bodies of water this far north, and besides, they give our location at exactly the spot where the true geographic pole ought to be."

Professor Marble looked at the commander intently, and then blurted out.

"Are you sure you read your charts correctly, commander?" he asked.

Bob's face reddened under his tan, but he smiled easily.

"I've been reading charts too long, professor," he said quickly, "to make such an error!"

"There's no mistake, professor!" said Lieutenant-Commander Bright. "We're over the true pole right enough, but there seems to be a tigger in the woodpile somewhere! I've been on the bridge for hours, and we've maintained our course straight for the pole!"

"But this water and the bird, gentlemen," insisted the scientist, "are completely baffling. If we are at the true pole, then other explorers have erred, because we have no record of a body of water this far north. And it's warm water, too!"

"Reminds me of Marshall B. Gardner's theories of a temperate zone in the arctic," Dr Ralston interjected, "but of course little credence has ever been placed in that in his book he contended that the true pole had never been discovered."

"But that's not altering our situation, gentlemen," said Bob "We're either at the North Pole or we're not. I confess that I'm mystified. The whole thing is a mystery beyond my powers of comprehension; the lake, the bird and what appears to be an overcast, semi-tropical country."

"Well, there must be some sort of land just beyond the horizon," said Professor Marble, "otherwise that bird would not have plunged straight down. The pterodactyl is a land bird, not an amphibian. I suggest that we cruise along over there and investigate. Perhaps our missing men discovered this mystery and went further to look into it and became lost somewhere beyond."

"That's a logical idea," said Dr Ralston.

"Then we'll go over and have a look." Bob nodded, turning to Bright. "Change her course north by northwest, Bright!"

A Strange World

As the *Annihilator* proceeded on her new course, those on the bridge were treated to a strange sight in the water below. From an altitude of several hundred feet, the water in the mysterious lake appeared as transparent as a great sheet of thick glass. They could see great schools of fish churning through the water on every hand. Frequently huge water mammals blew the surface and they caught sight of tremendous snouts and great, spread jaws. The water was fairly alive with organisms of one sort or another. Immense shoals of savage-looking fish swam, feeding, in the wake of retreating schools. Then they had a glimpse of a great sun that seemed to rise in front of the ship. It literally popped up and stood in the heavens a few degrees above the horizon.

Commander Allison ordered the *Annihilator* directly into the sun. for it lay in the course taken by the huge bird. Speeding in that direction at a velocity that was now little less than 200 miles per hour, the *Annihilator* went hissing over the great lake fire some huge bird of prey. Gradually the water became shallower as they could easily see from the altitude, and presently, it lapped placidly on a shore that was lined with tropical vegetation. Had they been flying around some inland sea along the equator, they could have been in no more tropical territory than that which lay spread out before their eyes.

Great flocks of varicolored birds scattered before the huge leviathan of mankind and took refuge in what appeared to be an impenetrable jungle. The sun still lay ahead, just above the horizon, easting warmth over a tropical land that lay beneath its beams. Was this ball of fire the central sun in the interior of the earth, as theorized, back in 1920, by that brilliant scientist, Marshall B Gardner, whose interesting book^[*] had sought to prove that the poles had never really been discovered? Was this great ball of fire the flaming core of the earth or was it actually a central sun spraying an interior world with life-giving properties?

Professor Marble found himself speculating upon these thoughts as the *Annihilator* continued across the matted jungles that lay under her belly. It was very hard for him to concede that Gardner's theories concerning an interior world within our globe were correct. He recalled the famous book and reasoned that the theorist had offered a sound enough argument, yet it was hard to believe that within the confines of the icy north a tropical land could exist, teeming with a life that should have passed out of existence thousands of years ago.

Great birds with membranous wings and long, saw-toothed beaks took wing from the higher rocks in the jungle and flapped slowly away at the approach of the *Annihilator*. Marble finally decided, as the ship slowed down its velocity for an investigation into the mystery, that here was some great valley that the passing of centuries had in no way affected with a change of life. But how could such a valley exist at the North Pole? By the time the *Annihilator* grounded her gear on a flat, grassy meadow in the heart of the strange, teeming jungle, Professor Marble began to concede that there might be something after all in Gardner's theories. And before the search for the lost Swedish scientists had come to an end, he was destined to credit those theories whole-heartedly.

[*] "A Jourwey Into the Earth's Interior" or "Have the Poles Really Been Discovered?" published in 1920 by Marshall B. Gardner, its author.

There has always been something of a mystery surrounding the discovery of the huge ice-encrusted mastodon by the Tongoose fisherman, Schumacher, in the Arctic Circle. Professor Marble, like many another scientist, had marveled at that discovery of the mammoth held in a perfect state of preservation by a refrigeration of ice, and had wondered whence it had come. Now Marble and the others on board the *Annihilator* were seeing with their own eyes the very jungles that had undoubtedly reared that same mammal countless centuries before.

As the *Annihilator* shut off her exhausts and her officers prepared a scouting party, those on the bridge saw a herd of huge, towering mastodons thundering away from the meadow. There must have been fifty beasts in the great herd, their long, up-curling tusks standing out before their heads, shoving small trees aside as though they were match-sticks. The thunder of their pounding feet caused the earth to tremble as they stampeded away.^[*]

But would the lost Swedish explorers be found in this strange world? It was only natural for Commander Allison and those under him to believe that they would be! Word received by the Markham Island base of the expedition had told that the scientists had been camped at what they said was the true North Pole. Perhaps they had encountered the mysterious open lake and had followed it until they found themselves lost in a strange, tropical domain. Bob had little doubt that they would be found somewhere in the teeming world and he was now prepared to search for them.

Exciting Moments

Had he been an older man and less imbued with the spirit of adventure, he might have placed a subordinate in charge of the scouting expedition and taken himself to the safety of his cabin. But Bob Allison had a desire to be in the thick of things, especially if adventure beckoned. And adventure called him strongly; he could not resist going at the head of the party into this strange land on whose every side strange beasts peered at the invaders.

[*]It was Marshall B. Gardner who first offered an argument as to the source of the preserved mastodon. He had fought a bitter battle with orthodox science in an effort to prove that the mastodon had come from a tropical world inside of the earth. But strangely, little faith was placed in his theories. However, there was no denying them now! The interior of the earth was a world in itself, a warm tropical world which thundered with the teeming life that on the exterior had long been extinct. It had its own sun, the flaming mass which orthodox science claimed was merely the core of the earth, it had its own lakes, its own atmosphere. The *Annihilator* had unconsciously entered it through the northern entrance, an open polar cap 1400 miles across, and was now under an 800-mile thick earth-crust upon which humanity subsisted.

Armed to the teeth with powerful rifles that shot explosive projectiles, they crossed the meadow in the direction taken by the herd of mammoths. Keen-eyed observers had spotted, in the valley beyond, what appeared to be the tail sections of a wrecked airship. There was no way of telling exactly what it was when the *Annihilator* flew over it, because of the harmonious color-scheme of the jungle. And the wreckage had appeared smoke-blackened, leading Bob to believe that the Swedish ship had crashed and burned on the spot.

At the head of fifty armed members of his crew, and flanked by Professor Marble, Dr. Ralston and Lieutenant-Commander Bright, Bob led the party down into a ravine to the edge of a swamp. A huge dinosaur stood in the center of the pool, lapping lily-pads as unconcernedly as a domestic cat drinking milk out of a saucer. The beast looked up calmly and scrutinized the party, then lumbered away, its great reptilian tail swaying from side to side.

"Good Lord, commander!" ejaculated Professor Marble, trembling with excitement "That was an herbivorous dinosaur! Why, from all understanding of modern science, that beast should have been extinct for a million years! What do you think of it? Dr Ralston? Dr Ralston stood at the edge of the swamp and studied the huge dinosaur tracks, exactly like those preserved in the asphalt beds of Wyoming and Nebraska; then he shook his head blankly.

"Damned if I can think anything, Marble!" he said incredulously. "I can't believe my eyes. But undoubtedly the beast was an herbivorous dyno!"

Suddenly the air was rent with a scream of terrible agony. Every single member of the party automatically gripped his gun. The scream was inhuman, like the maniacal shriek of some primeval beast in the throes of death. Then there was a commotion on the other side of a medium-sized pool. A horrible-looking creature had emerged from the water and grasped a small animal of the primate class, and was chewing it savagely. It was a great, ferocious marine lizard thirty feet long, and it was retreating into the water again with its victim between its saw-edged teeth. Instinctively Bob raised his explosive-throwing pistol and let fly. The pistol cracked softly but the explosion of the missile inside the lizard sent a thunderous report reverberating through the jungles.

The lizard's head was torn from its body and the creature fell to the shallow water, thrashing madly, its great tail beating the water and throwing a warm spray over those who watched. Then, its death struggles ceased and it lay still, half submerged in the stagnant pool. The men went around to the other side and Professor Marble, after a brief study of the creature, declared

that it bore complete resemblance to remains of such lizards taken from the chalk-beds of Kansas and Missouri.

Then pandemonium seemed to break loose! The explosion of Bob's missile had awakened the dismal jungles around them, and creatures went crashing through the matted entanglements on every side. The herd of mastodons thundered down the ravine, trumpeting in a terrifying manner. Towering dinosaurs, herbivorous and carnivorous, rose from the brush, stared at the strange creatures that had suddenly come among them, and raced away. And the pool boiled under the lashing of tremendous tails, snapping jaws and swimming water denizens, frightened by the sudden concussion.

Stupefied at the abrupt uproar and the many strange beasts around them, the party stood stock-still and stared, open-mouthed. Commander Allison, his pistol half-raised, was watching the approach of the mastodons. They came roaring down the valley toward them at a terrific speed. The ground seemed to tremble with the rise and fall of their thunderous feet. Horrifying blasts rent the silence as the herd crashed down upon the party with renewed speed.

Bob's pistol cracked again and again, and each time the crash of a giant body followed the roar of exploding missiles that mangled the beasts horribly. Then the whole party sprang into action. Rifles were lifted to strong shoulders and they belched death into the herd. But so mad was its rush that the remaining members came on like express trains, clearing the fallen beasts in wild leaps, Bob dropped a leading mammal; then his pistol snapped, empty. Rapidly the rifles cracked until half the herd lay dead or dying.

Seeing that the beasts were bent upon running them down, Bob ordered a retreat as the herd swung upon them. The party scattered immediately into the jungles to escape the enraged beasts. Bob, with his first officer Bright, sought the safety of a huge tree that swung spreading branches over the jungle level. Scarcely had they departed from the dead water-lizard than the remainder of the mastodon herd roared past and crashed away.

Commander Allison re-loaded his heavy pistol as he sat in a crotch of the tree and jammed it into his waist holster. Lieutenant-Commander Bright sat on a higher branch above and grinned, but his face was pale.

"Narrow escape, Commander" he said, trembling "They'd have trampled the whole party in another minute!"

"I thought we could stop the stampede," said Bob, glancing below him. "But evidently there's no stopping those beasts when they get started. Quite an odd experience for a modern man, eh?"

"Odd?" queried Bright "Odd, hell! Its stupefying, sir!"

Bob chuckled softly and looked at his subordinate quizzically.

"Not scared, are you, Bright?" he quizzed.

"Not exactly, sir," declared Bright, truthfully "But I had a few funny sensations running through my innards when I saw that herd pounding down upon us! You could call it fright if you want to!"

"I suppose we all experienced sinking sensations, Bright," said Bob, peering into the branches above him. "It's no crime for a man to get rattled under conditions like these!"

In the moss-covered branches above him, Bob thought he detected a slight movement like the body of a snake crawling slowly across knotted boughs. Instinctively he drew his pistol and waited. Bright glanced up, yelled and swung down from his perch. Bob drew a bead on the slowly appearing head of a giant reptile and fired. The head vanished with an explosion and the giant tree shook madly under the death-throes of a monster snake! A great green and yellow tail lashed out in a giant death-thrust. It caught Bob across the shoulders and sent him spinning into the lower branches, clutching frantically. His pistol dropped to the ground as he grasped at the twisted boughs. There he hung, gasping for breath; then let himself safely to the ground.

Lieutenant-Commander Bright was waiting for him. He had recovered the pistol and was re-loading the empty chamber.

"Hurt, sir?" he asked, handing over Bob's gun.

"Knorked the breath out of me, Bright!" he said, still gasping. "Cripes, what a snake! Must be fifty feet long!"

"You should have dropped out of the tree when I did, Commander!" said Bright. "We had plenty of time to get out."

"I was taking no chances," Bob nodded, rubbing his shoulder and grimacing. "I'm going to shoot first around here and argue afterward! Now where the hell is our party?"

"They scattered into the brush when the herd came down upon us," said Bright, glancing around for a sign of the men. "I haven't seen hide nor hair of one of 'em since, sir! Perhaps they've returned to the *Annihilator*."

CHAPTER V

A NEW DANGER

FEARING for their lives, Commander Allison and Lieutenant-Commander Bright remained for a long time beside the great tree in whose higher branches lay the still body of the monster reptile. Around them the prehistoric jungles roared with awe-inspiring life. But gradually the tu-

mult subsided as the beasts slowly forgot about the strange sounds created by the invaders. Then, the two officers of the *Annihilator* found themselves immersed in a dead silence. Cautiously they strode, side by side, pistols ready, toward the edge of the stagnant pool. The ground was mucky from the pounding of tremendous feet. The water-lizard had vanished. A commotion in the center of the pool told them that other creatures were feeding upon the remains.

Then, out of the oppressive silence came a sudden, prolonged shriek of the *Annihilator's* sirens. The two officers stiffened rigidly and regarded each other in blank amazement. Almost at once there came the muffled crack of staccato explosions, finally followed by the rolling boom of the ship's high-powered rifles. From which direction the sounds came, they could not determine. The roar and crash sounded solidly around them. Lieutenant-Commander Bright stared into the tight-lipped features of his superior and addressed him.

"Sounds like a fight, Commander!" he gasped "Maybe the *Annihilator* is being attacked by some creatures!"

"Perhaps we'd better scout around and find out!" exclaimed Bob. "Which way did we come to get down here!"

"I think we came down that bank on the other side," Bright replied, tensely. "We can follow the party's tracks back to the meadow!"

Whatever intentions or hopes Lieutenant-Commander Bright had of following the tracks of the party back to the *Annihilator* were immediately quashed when it was discovered that all boot-prints had been obliterated by the pound of animal feet. Not a human spoor remained to be observed. Frightened, maddened beasts had covered them completely, leaving not so much as a heel-mark anywhere in the muck that might direct the two officers in the direction of the *Annihilator*.

It was with the grim realization that they were lost and deserted that they started up the steep mucky bank which they thought led to the land on which the *Annihilator* was grounded. But they fought their way up the slippery side of the slope and presently stood on a tree-covered plain. It was not the grassy meadow upon which the ship had settled, and while they stood there gaping at a huge dinosaur, that stood among the trees not far away, they realized that they were lost indeed! Bob pulled up his pistol in line with the beast's head, but Bright held his arm.

"We're lost. Commander," he said. "Better save your ammunition!"

Bob lowered his gun, nodded and jammed it into its holster. Then they studied the lay of the land around them and decided to return to the pool in hopes of finding some hidden tracks of the party.

Scarcely had they gone a dozen feet down the slippery incline when a stone-tipped spear thudded into the ground between them. They paused, amazed and bewildered, to watch the shaft vibrating like a fast-moving pendulum. Instantly they lunged for their pistols, studying the terrain below them.

What they saw on the other side of the pool caused them to recoil and crouch, horror-stricken.

Across the swamp, a half-hundred blood-curdling creatures with scaly, human-like bodies and Triceratopsid^[*] heads, stood on the fringe of the jungle and watched the crouching officers on the bank. They stood upright on two feet like a man. but their heads were the most frightful things Bob Allison or Bright had ever beheld. With a large bony armor curving down from the tops of their heads and across their shoulders, and savage, cruel eyes inserted above beastly snouts, the creatures sent stark terror surging through the brains of the two officers.

Then, one of the beasts poised a spear and let it fly. It curved a graceful arc over Bob's head and buried its point notch-deep, in the soft earth. Mechanically he lifted his pistol and fired into the horde. The foremost Triceratopsian was torn to shreds as the missile from the gun exploded in his chest.

Instantly the space between the two humans hummed with singing darts. A barb scraped Bright's neck, creasing the flesh. He let out a stream of oaths and fired rapidly at the creatures below. He was an expert shot with a pistol and as rapidly as he could pull the trigger, his ears were rewarded by muffled explosions and terrible, beastly screams. But the Triceratopsians held their ground and hurled spear after spear in the direction of the death-spewing pistols.

Bob held his fire after his first shot, until Bright's pistol clicked on an empty cylinder; then he fired. Bright reloaded swiftly and by turns they sent missiles of terrible destruction into the horde in the swamp. Spears came from everywhere and then, finally screaming arrows stirred up a hornets' nest of buzzing around them. An arrow went through Bob's vizor like a bullet, lifting it back on his head; then another, creased at his boot-top, glanced off and lay beside him. He glanced at it quickly. The dart was tipped with an ivory head, sharpened to needle-point and notched along the edges. It made him shiver and he turned again to the horde that seemed bent upon annihilating them.

Captured!

The creatures were spreading out into a long line now, as though preparing to rush. They sent a stream of arrows at the two half-hidden humans,

[*] Referring to a giant plant-eating dinosaur.

their huge bows twanging loudly, and then as by some signal, they broke and rushed. As they came, Bob and Bright retreated slowly up the bank, firing rapidly at the fast running beings in an effort to check their rush. Arrows continued to sing around their heads, and they wondered at the miracle that kept them among the living. Standing on the top of the incline they again paused. A barrage of darts whistled past them and they decided that things were getting too hot for them. They turned abruptly and raced headlong toward the trees. The dinosaur had vanished, but weird forms scuttled under the branches.

The triceratopsians followed on the run. They were flanked by others now which had come upon the scene like glistening, scaly beasts of a nightmare. Bob Allison and his first officer kept on steadily toward the trees. Small animals scurried out of their path on stilted legs. They were ant-like creatures as large as domesticated cats and made strange noises as they ran.

Then, as the two officers entered the fringe of the jungle, they found themselves confronted by another battalion of the grotesque creatures. From behind massive tree-trunks surged a veritable army of Triceratopsians. They came forward at once, spears upraised, and the two humans discovered that they were now surrounded on all sides by hideous, beastly beings who screeched triumphantly as they closed upon them.

Standing back to back. Bob and Bright shot rapidly into the ranks that slowly closed around them on all sides. They sent slug after slug into them, mangling horribly those who were hit. Bob hoped the others would become frightened and retreat. But the Triceratopsians refused to become frightened. Instead, they fitted ivory-tipped arrows into their powerful bows and let fly, but with mighty poor accuracy.

Both men were nicked in a dozen places and blood coursed down Bright's face from a crease across his scalp. A sharp pain told Bob that an arrow had seared his thigh. But he paid no attention to it. They fired as rapidly as they could and by the time their pistols were empty, the horde was upon them.

As he was being lifted bodily onto the broad back of a frightful Triceratopsian, Bob brought his pistol down upon the creature's bony head with a menace. There was a dull thud and the creature merely snorted, while another yanked the pistol from his hand. He received a sound cuffing across the back from the fellow that had his gun and then lay still, panting and gasping for breath. He shot a quick glance toward Bright. The first officer lay on another broad back behind him, his face covered with blood and his head hanging grotesquely to one side.

"Bright!" Bob cried, apprehensively "Bright!"

Lieutenant-Commander Bright's head moved slowly and wobbled

drunkenly, then he managed to accumulate sufficient strength to raise it. Through blood-filled eyes he regarded the terror-stricken features of the commander and grinned strangely.

"I'm all right, sir," he said, faintly. "Guess I'm just weak from loss of blood!"

The creature who bore Allison turned his beastly head and looked at him, Bob recoiled from the awesome brute's breath, and squirmed to avoid it. Great hands, with three-taloned fingers and a cruel, bony thumb, clutched at him tightly and held him with a vise-like grip.

Bob shuddered and sucked in his breath.

The Triceratopsian that carried Bright, paused and shook him like a rat in a terrier's teeth. Bright emitted a groan and lay still. His eyes closed and his head hung limply. Bob cursed under his breath as he saw the body of his officer go limp. Then he heard again the scream of the *Annihilator's* sirens, followed by a series of rapid explosions. To his ears finally came a deep-throated roar. He shrank against the broad back that earned him, well-knowing what that roar meant. The *Annihilator* had suddenly taken the air! Instinctively he searched the skies over his head. Far above him he caught the flash of a glistening body. From it trailed streaks of pale blue flame. Then it vanished like a will-o-the-wisp in the distance.

The Annihilator had deserted its commander and its first officer! Why it had suddenly taken off and roared out of sight? Bob could not guess, unless it was because the ship too had been attacked by the Triceratopsians and was forced to flee for safety. But why had she gone beyond sight? He could not see or understand why such an impregnable craft as the *Annihilator II* would flee before a lot of old-world savages. But Bob Allison was destined to learn much of this old world before he became many days older!

A Mysterious Sound

For what seemed an hour, Bob lay across the back of the Triceratopsian that bore him through the jungle with little effort. Frequently he glanced at the inert form of Bright. Several times the first officer had groaned and Bob wondered if he was dying. Dry blood caked the man's features and the small area of skin that showed here and there on his cheeks was as white as death.

During all this time the creatures pushed through the jungle in an arrow-point formation. The bristling thickets with their sabre-like thorns did not hinder them, merely scraping against their scaled bodies and being brushed aside. But often strange thorns pricked the unprotected bodies of the officers, causing the flesh around the wounds to become dead for a time and then to pain nauseatingly. Their clothing was soon torn to shreds and they were suffering from head to foot.

They came upon another herd, this time one of imperial elephants, graz-

ing in an open glade. They raised their trunks and trumpeted shrilly at the procession; then resumed feeding. The Triceratopsians seemed to have no fear of the huge beasts. They went right along as though they did not exist, and Bob wondered if the trumpeting was a kind of beastly salute.

After a period of precarious climbing, the Triceratopsians traversed a low range covered with vegetation and entered a wide, open valley. As they emerged from the jungle, Bob's eyes concentrated upon the burned hull of a huge airship. It lay in a twisted mass, beryllium girders and braces standing out like the bones of some grotesque skeleton. He studied the wreckage for a moment and then gasped. A thin plate of steel lay a few yards from the blackened frame. Upon it were the serial numbers and name of the lost explorers' ship, the *Skjangh*. He twisted his head toward Lieutenant-Commander Bright and yelled loudly.

"Bright!" he cried. "Snap out of it, old man! Look at that wreck!"

Bright managed to life his head and to stare off to his right. His head wobbled and it must have been seconds before he could clear his brain of the stupor that clouded it. Then his eyes popped open with recognition.

"A wrecked airship, Allison!" he exclaimed. "It's not the—the *Annihilator*, is it?"

"You're goofy yet, Bight!" said Bob. "Take a look at that steel plate laying in the open!"

Bright stared at the square of steel for a moment and then regarded his superior officer with flashing eyes.

"The *Skjangh*," he snapped, hopefully. "The ship of the lost men!"

"Right!" the commander agreed "It's the *Skjangh*, the ship for which we've been searching!"

Bright nodded.

"If the explorers were in some kind of a battle with these beastly devils," he said, "it's logical to think that the victors would burn or destroy the ship to prevent them from escaping!"

"Right you are!" said Bob "That's exactly what happened, I'll wager! Some powerful tribe annihilated the *Skjangh* and made off with the crew and passengers, even as they attempted to capture the *Annihilator*. Did you know, Bight, that the *Annihilator* has gone aloft and away—deserted us.

Bright's mouth opened in a terrified expression. He stared at Commander Allison for a long moment and then groaned.

"Deserted us? My God, how could they take off and leave us here to be slaughtered by these devils

"You must have been out, then, when she went away, Bight!" said Bob Allison, frankly. "I watched her disappear in the distance. But don't forget,

old timer, that we're not dead yet, and the *Annihilator* will undoubtedly return!"

"I have scant respect for the young nincompoops in command of her now. Allison!" Bight swore, groaning and nursing his neck. His hand came away from the wound covered with clotted blood. He stared at it for an instant and then spat deliberately down the back of the beast that earned him. The Triceratopsian paid no heed to the insult, but merely went on without turning even his head.

The Triceratopsians had crossed the open ground and now headed again into the brush. Allison noticed well-worn trails on every hand now, and from far away, his ears detected the throb of drums. He decided that the sound must come from some tremendous kettledrums, for it was different from any other sound to which his ears were accustomed. The jungles were reechoing the throbbing rumbles that sounded like steady, intermittent rolls of thunder, the beats timed to a second.

Bob relaxed his legs and arms and lay across the muscular shoulders of the brute, resigned now to whatever the future held for him. He watched the muscles play in powerful knots across the broad, scaled back of the Triceratopsian. From the neck down, the fellow was a fine specimen of human structure. But from the neck up, he was utterly loathsome.

Bob studied the creature's feet as it trod the trail. Its pedal extremities were clawed like its hands and spread out like the feet of some predatory bird. There were as many talon-tipped toes as there were fingers on his rather well-shaped human-like hands. But the claws of each could have torn a man to shreds within a minute, so sharp and terrible were they.

The Triceratopsians were a head taller than Bob, making them close to seven feet high. They swung through the jungles with the ease and grace of an Iroquois, looking neither to the right nor left. They seemed to be the supreme rulers of all the beasts of the forests, and when any other creatures were encountered in the gloom-filled forest aisles, these either hissed, snorted or bellowed, and then resumed feeding. Everything, even the great savage mastodons and the towering dinosaurs, seemed to bow to the mysterious supremacy of this Triceratopsian horde, these strange beings, half-dinosaur and half-man.

Bob wondered at this great mystery, which, to him, as a layman, was insolvable. He could hardly believe it possible for a modern man to be taken back into the dim ages of the beginning. The whole thing seemed like some wild nightmare and he wondered if he were really awake or dreaming!

But the swaying motion of the beast that earned him told him plainly that he was very much alive. And among other things, the persistent throb

of thunderous drums informed him that they were getting nearer to the sounds. The thunder rolled down upon his ears more sharply now as though some giant creature stood before a mammoth drum and pounded it steadily with two mighty hammers, one in each hand.

Presently, he found himself thinking of Joan. Would he ever see her again? Why hadn't he resigned his rank to carry out the plans for their marriage? What would she think when the world learned that the two commanders of the *Annihilator* had gone to their death at the hands of some terrible creatures deep within the earth? He doubted if the news would kill her, but it certainly would cast a shadow over the remainder of her life. He cursed himself for a fool for ever undertaking the venture in search of the lost scientists whose wrecked ship had already been discovered. Life certainly was cruel to him. Scarcely had he recovered from his experiences in the *Annihilator I*, it seemed, than he found his life imperiled again under even more frightful conditions. Disaster certainly bounded him!

CHAPTER VI THE BEASTS AT HOME

EVENTUALLY the procession went down a steep incline and entered upon another flat plain. The throb of the drums was very close now and Bob studied the terrain ahead. As far as his eyes could see there was a vast flat plain with towering lush grass swaying gently in a warm breeze. Great animals grazed here and there, their heads high above the waving grass. Two dinosaurs stood off to the left and regarded them for a long moment, then raced away the gigantic kangaroos. Every bound carried them entirely out of the grass and presently they vanished in the distance.

There was a sudden, terrifying scream from somewhere close at hand, Bob's hand went instinctively to his empty holster. The scream sounded like some giant in distress, so close was it. Then he caught sight of a great ground-sloth racing madly through the grass. A large, tawny cat, with tremendous fangs protruding from its jaws, tore after it, screaming the maniacal cry of the hunting jungle beast.

From his perch on the shoulders of the Triceratopsian he could watch the race of death as the animals appeared frequently in little open patches on the plain. The great saber-toothed tiger was gaming rapidly. Presently it paused, crouched down in a little glade to bunch its muscles, and sprang into the air. There was a terrified squeal from the victim and then the lush grass at the spot was in terrific commotion.

For a few tense moments he watched the struggle and then all became still except for the gentle weaving of the grass under the influence of the breeze. The tiger had evidently won and had settled down to gorge.

Swiftly now the horde made headway. The creatures almost ran along the wide, road-like trails before them. The Triceratopsian who earned Bob and Bright seemed tireless. They maintained the pace set by the others with little effort despite their burdens. Then, suddenly the trail widened into a tremendous clearing in which stood innumerable mound-shaped dwellings of what looked like adobe mud; in the center towered one great structure above all others. It consumed an area of nearly an acre. The rest of the village was built around it in a circle, and Bob concluded, as a vast throng of Triceratopsians came forth to meet the procession, that the central structure was some kind of a council-house. He shot a quick, apprehensive glance at Bright.

The first officer of the *Annihilator* was sitting upright now upon the shoulders of his beast of burden. The Triceratopsian must have perched him astraddle of his neck so he could be carried more easily. Bright presented a strange sight, riding as though straddling a horse, on the neck of the grotesque beast, and Bob grinned. His friend seemed to be enjoying his ride for now, for he had regained some of his lost strength and had managed to mop some of the clotted blood from his face. He was holding on to the creature, with his hands gripped on the curling plate of bone armor that ran from the top of his captor's head to shoulder level. His body swayed in rhythm with every quick step taken by the beast under him.

A tremendous crowd of Triceratopsians now stood in front of the procession. Half-grown Triceratopsian youngsters, grotesque little devils at best and filled with blood-lust, thronged the edge of the gathering, and picked up stones with eager hands. The mass broke suddenly and the procession entered an aisle packed on both sides by grunting, beastly creatures. Troops of youngsters fell in behind and Bob was forced to dodge small stones that were hurled at him by young hands.

Suddenly the two humans were placed on the hard-packed ground and shoved forward, side by side. The Triceratopsians fell in around them closely, as though to protect them from the barrage of stones that gleeful Triceratopsian brats were pelting them with.

"The dirty little rats!" snarled Bright "I'd like to get my fingers on the throat of that leader . . . the biggest one of the mob! I'd certainly wring it for him!"

A small stone bounced off a Triceratopsian helmet and smacked Bob on the temple. His knees buckled under him from the numbing force of the missile and Bright held him up as a brute lifted a clawed foot to deliver him

a sound kick for faltering. Bob groaned and shot a hand to his head. The force of the blow reeled him and a tiny stream of blood dribbled from his temple.

The Triceratopsians now strode so swiftly toward the great council-house that Bob and Bright, weak as they were, found it difficult to maintain the pace. Frequently the creatures behind them shoved them forward or delivered vicious kicks that at times almost sent them on their faces. Half-running, they finally reached the huge structure and were picked up again in scaled arms. Then the procession entered and Bob and Bright were unceremoniously hurled upon what appeared to be an altar in the center of the large room.

A great gathering of Triceratopsians was already on hand, sitting in an unbroken circle around the altar like an audience in a circular theater. A few feet in front of the first row of leering spectators sat a tremendous brute. He towered head and shoulders above the others and held in his claw-like fists a knotted club that was stained with vermilion. Pendants of bone dangled from the shaft and a human skull hung suspended on a cord around his stubby, beastly neck.

Beside him squatted a white-haired human, his features half-hidden behind a stained, knotted beard, his eyes flashing with the same terrible cruelty that marked the apparent devilry of the huge creature himself! The man was naked except for a narrow breech-cloth of tiger skin around his skinny, wrinkled loins. Around his waist was a cartridge bandolier and in a handy holster nestled an ancient pistol of the kind that had preceded the introduction of the modern guns that shot missiles filled with high explosives.

The Renegade

When Bob's eyes fell upon the human who was evidently a white man well advanced in years, he was astonished beyond description. It was certainly strange to find a white man on intimate terms with the frightful beasts of this dawn-age jungle! And the man was sitting placidly beside a triceratopsian who, to all appearances, was the chief of the horde! It was a mystery that caused both officers to stare incredulously at the man. How did he come to be there, and how did he manage to place himself so high in the esteem of the Triceratopsians as to give him a ranking position beside the cruel leader?

Bob and Bright sat up presently on the altar and stared around them. Evil faces confronted them on every hand. The throbbing of the drums smote upon their ears with a menace, then suddenly it ceased. For what seemed a long time they sat still, staring into the cruel features of the man beside the chief, as though too stupefied to speak.

The man regarded them calmly, never moving an inch. His eyes stared like the open eyes of the dead, never blinking. Had he been an image of stone, he could not have sat more still and rigid. He seemed to be trying to bore into the very souls of the two officers, and they shuddered. After a time Bob slowly pulled his pipe from a pocket, filled it with a fragrant tobacco from a small water-tight container, and struck a match to it. Bright watched him through wide eyes as he held the match over the bowl and puffed. From out of the sides of his eyes Bob studied the creatures around him. Their mouths snapped open in astonishment when they beheld the match flame. The man beside the chief sat as immobile as a stone figure. Then Bob addressed him sternly.

"What's the big idea of taking us captive, old man?" he snapped "Have we harmed you or your vulgar friends in coming here?"

The ancient devil's tousled head moved a fraction of an inch, but his eyes bored straight ahead at the two ragged officers. Bob puffed on his pipe with a feigned calmness and wondered if the man understood English. Perhaps the man was dumb or long years spent with the awesome Triceratopsians had dulled his wits to any kind of human communication.

As he speculated upon the strange presence of the fellow in this remote world within the earth, he decided that he must be a lost polar explorer who had wandered across the open lake and entered the steaming jungles, over which he must now rule partly. He did not doubt that the man had lost all sense of respect for mankind. Men have been known to return to the jungle and cast all their civilized traits into the discard for the freedom of savagery.

"Well, can't you answer me?" Bob asked impatiently, putting on a bold front in an effort to bluff his way into liberty.

By the looks in the eyes of the Triceratopsians, he somehow felt that they held him in some kind of awe since he flicked his match into flame. He had read books of history in which men won freedom and safety by just such acts as striking a match at the right time, making their savage captors believe they possessed supernatural powers. That was the reason why he had lit his pipe when he did

He blew a cloud of white smoke from his lips and spat deliberately at the feet of the squatting Triceratopsian ruler. The huge fellow blinked his eyes stupidly and stared at the two captives. Then the old man twisted his leathery lips into a snarl and spoke.

"Yes, I can answer you," he snapped. His voice seemed to come from between clenched teeth. "You have been taken into captivity by the Ruler of All who has forbidden the existence of humans in the world that cradled

him. Our great chief, Hokar, master of the world within a world, makes war on all who trespass.”

“Then what the hell are you doing here?” Bright snapped heatedly. “You’re a hell of a fine specimen of humanity to be in cahoots with a mob of cut-throats like this.”

“If I prefer the society of these people to your kind, it’s none of our business,” the man hissed with menacing evil. “I chose this kind of beings rather than to continue living with your kind who drove me here!”

“Drove you here!” Bob asked incredulously. “What do you mean?”

Bright’s eyes lighted with suspicion and he nodded at Bob.

“He’s an escaped criminal who wandered north and found a way into the interior, Allison,” he sneered, glancing furtively at the man to see the effect of his assertion. The man scowled and clenched his fists tightly.

“Exactly!” he growled tensely. “But you’ll never get out to tell where I am!”

“And why not?” Bob questioned, arching his brows in feigned surprise.

“Because it is the will of Hokar that you die even as others like you will die in the jaws of the Triceratops!” the man snapped.

“Others?” gasped Bob, leaning forward. He had a vague suspicion of the meaning of the man’s words. Surely, he did not refer to the lost explorers as the “others.” Or had more of his own men from the *Annihilator* been taken?

“Others!” the man repeated. “Swedes!”

“Then you have taken the scientists whose ship we saw wrecked on the way here?” asked Bob.

“Hokar has set the Swedes aside for his especial pleasure!” the old man gritted as though trying to control an insane anger that was burning within him for all humanity. “We wrecked their ship when it landed, and captured the lot to fill the belly of the sacred Triceratops!”

The Sentence

“Good Lord, man,” said Bright savagely. You couldn’t stand aside and watch your kind murdered in cold blood!”

“Don’t you fool yourself about me, mister!” he scowled, stroking his stained beard with a gnarled hand. “I’ve enjoyed it before and I’ll enjoy it again when you two smart alecs go into the jaws of the beast which these good people worship as you worship your God . . . if you have one!”

“You seem to forget that our ship, the *Annihilator*, will come back here and blow you all to hell!” snapped Bob. “You might kill us, old man, but you’ll die yourself as a result. My men will return here to demand our release. If you and Hokar fail, they’ll blast the whole tribe to pieces!”

“You can’t frighten me or Hokar, young fellow!” snapped the man with an evil hiss “It’s been tried before! You can’t bull your way out in the first place,

you killed a dozen of Hokar's men! He demands your lives in payment for them. And by hell you're going to pay his bill and mine too."

"What's your bill?" quizzed Bob with sarcasm.

"Civilization has wronged me, young man!" Hokar's ancient lieutenant snarled "It accused me of a murder that I did not commit! It confined me in your prison at Nome. It took my wife away from me . . . ruined me in the eyes of all men! They tortured me until they made me confess to that crime; then sentenced me to hang! But I escaped! And all civilization is going to pay one of these days when Hokar's strength increases. He'll sweep the whole surface clean! But you're going to be the first on account. Your fives are going toward the settlement of civilization's debt to me. It will be a pleasure to see two officers of the United States Air Forces die a dozen deaths in one!"

"You're crazy!" grumbled Bright, amazed. "You're as crazy as a loon!"

"Who are you, anyhow?" gasped Bob, smiling grimly at the old fellow's evident insanity.

"You wouldn't know me!" the man hissed. "I escaped from Nome before you were born! But if it'll do you any good . . . I am Richard Brandt, formerly of Seattle and Nome."

"Never heard of you!" said Bob. "What you did before you came here is nothing to me! We are not responsible for your hatred of society!"

"Every civilized man is responsible!" growled Brandt.

He nudged the grotesque beast beside him and addressed him in grunting tones. Hokar bent close to him and snarled like an angry beast. The two officers condemned to die in the jaws of the sacred Triceratops were amazed that Richard Brandt could converse easily with Hokar in the ruler's grunting speech. They conversed like snarling dogs for a moment and then Brandt faced the captives again.

"Hokar has set your doom for tomorrow when the mists clear from the face of the Central Sun." Brandt interpreted with a pleased grin "At that time a thousand warriors will return from the place where they attacked your ship. They will bring other prisoners to die with you. Warriors from all Hokar's outposts will be on hand to witness the sacrifice."

Bob and Bright were stunned into immobility, unable to believe their ears. It was hard to realize that death loomed over them like a grim, menacing spectre; but there was no doubt that Hokar and Brandt meant to carry out their planes for their destruction on the morrow. But how did Brandt know that Hokar's warriors had made a successful raid on the *Annihilator's* scouting party? Undoubtedly they had attacked the ship and failed, but by Brandt's words, they must have taken the scouting party which had retreated into the jungle when the mastodon herd thundered down upon it at the

swamp. The two officers did not know the real significance of the throbbing drums, the wireless system of the savage tribes of Hoka. Richard Brandt must have taught the terrible Triceratopsians many things since he arrived among them. Communication by thundering drums must have been one of those things!

CHAPTER VII

IMPRISONED!

COMMANDER Robert Allison and his first officer Bright were taken without further ceremony out of the great council-house and led away. Outside a great mob had gathered to await the reappearance of the two officers who to them must have been as grotesque in appearance as any of the Triceratopsians were to the men from the *Annihilator*. Again, mobs of Triceratopsian youngsters, armed with stones and sharp sticks, flew at them with hatred. Bob kicked angrily at a savage, half-grown beast which had attempted to bite him, sending the beast spinning. Instantly a Triceratopsian cuffed him cruelly for his defensive act and they were led between mud houses and finally halted in front of a square stockade.

The mob followed growling and snarling among themselves like a pack of hunger-crazed wolves. But they stood away at a safe distance now as two Triceratopsian warriors swung open a great gate leading into the stockade which comprised towering logs, sharpened to points at the top like an old-time frontier fort. The two officers felt that Brandt had had a hand in having the stockade erected for it was different from any other type of Triceratopsian structure. It showed human thought and genius at first glance.

They were led into the "pen" rapidly. A dozen savages of Hoka's horde, followed by Brandt himself, escorted them to the far side of the stockade and proceeded at once to peg them out spread-eagle fashion to the rough wall. Knowing the uselessness of resistance, they meekly permitted themselves to be tied, hands and feet, with twisted fiber thongs that bit into their wrists with stinging pain. The Triceratopsians were certainly taking no chances on their breaking their bonds and escaping, for the bonds were drawn tight and knotted, almost shutting off the blood from their hands.

Brandt himself inspected the thongs and grunted with satisfaction. He stepped off and surveyed the doomed victims with an air of supreme contempt.

"That's the beginning of your end!" he snapped, waving the Triceratopses away with a flip of his grimy hand. "You'll hang there until Hoka is ready to feed you to his sacred beasts!"

"You'll suffer for this, you big stiff!" snapped Bob hatefully. "If I could get my fingers on you, I'd wring your scaly neck, you dirty . . ."

Brandt pulled his open hand back over his head and sent it with stinging force into the commander's writhing features. He groaned and sagged under the blow for it had great power despite the man's advanced age.

"That's what I think of you, young fellow." Brandt hissed. "I could tear you to shreds with my bare hands if I felt like it! But I'll get more satisfaction in seeing you chewed up in hunks!"

"You're a yellow rat, Brandt!" Bright swore in his face.

Hokar's human lieutenant drew back his fist again and held it. He grinned and let it fall, nodding.

"Yellow or not won't save you, mister!" he growled. "Another word out of you and I'll turn those savage brats in the pen to muss you up!"

"Yeah?" hissed Bright.

"*Yeah!*" snapped Brandt, emphatically, turning on his heel and walking toward the gate, which banged shut after he made his exit.

Bright, staring around the stockade, now gasped out loud at what he saw.

Pegged out against the wall on the far side were the sagging forms of other men, hanging limply to their wrist-thongs! Bright let out a curse and hissed at Bob. The commander was hanging almost inert from the effects of Brandt's savage blow, but he looked up at the voice of his first officer.

"We're not alone here. Allison!" cried Bright, excitedly. "Look over there."

Bob peered into the shadowy gloom across the stockade and gasped

"Men!" he exclaimed "Why, Bright, they must be the members of the Swedish polar expedition! Are they dead?"

"They look it, Commander," snapped Bright. "Not By God, they're living all right! They must have thought it best to play dead when we came in! Hey, over there!"

A man with a heavy black beard shook his head wildly and looked up. His eyes flashed like pools of fire in the gloom as they found the source of the voice that brought him out of a stupor. He stood suddenly rigid against the wall, tugged at his wrist bonds, and then stared across the stockade stupidly.

"What's wrong with you fellows . . . all dead?" Bright asked, pausing for a reply.

The bearded man shook his head dumbly and shrugged his powerful shoulders. Then he turned his head to the man next to him and hissed like a snake to call his attention. The fellow lifted his head and surveyed his neighbor with alarm. They conversed in an alien tongue for a moment and then the second man faced the distant wall of the stockade.

"My associate does not understand English," he said weakly. "We've been sleeping from exhaustion, I guess. What are you doing here?"

"The great Brandt has pegged us out for sacrifice!" Bob volunteered "Do you men belong to the Swedish polar expedition?"

"Brandt?" the man hissed. "The filthy murderer! Yes, we are all that remain of the expedition! What brought you into the interior?"

"The United States Government sent us out to look for you," Bob replied without hesitation. "And we were investigating a strange open lake on the surface when we came upon this world. I was in command of the *Annihilator II*, our ship. With Bright here, I set out with a scouting party to explore around. We got lost and were captured by Hokar's brutes."

"I'm sorry we were the cause of your predicament," the Swedish scientist said sadly. "We were twenty strong when we landed to investigate this interior world. Hokar's savages attacked our ship and destroyed it, killing ten men outright! Where is your ship now?"

"Gone!" said Bright. "The brutes attacked it and the officers in charge took her off. We've no idea where the *Annihilator* is now, but we have a feeling that she'll come back for us."

"Come back?" the man asked hopefully.

"She'll come back all right," snapped Bob. "And when she does, Brandt and Hokar will see hell popping!"

Hopeless

By this time, ten weary men, standing rigid against the wall opposite the two officers, were all staring with wide-eyed wonder. Professor Donalsen seemed to be the only member of the bedraggled expedition who could speak English, and he acted as spokesman for his fellows. He talked the whole matter over with the *Annihilator's* commanders and explained to his comrades all that was said. Bob and Bright saw their eyes flashing with joy as they learned that the *Annihilator* had attempted to find them. But they were suddenly downcast when they were informed of the ship's take-off, leaving its chief officers stranded. Bright interrupted the scientist and regarded him curiously.

"When has Brandt timed you for death?" he asked bluntly.

"He hasn't set any time yet," the scientist replied gloomily, "but we expect it with each passing hour! He's just playing with us now . . . killing us with anxiety and apprehension. And you . . .?"

"When the mists clear from the face of the Central Sun." Bright growled. "When will that be?"

"That will be tomorrow by our reckoning," said the professor tensely. "Each night there is a mist before the sun, probably steam, and when it clears,

Hokar's horde worships the Triceratops, a great beast to which they bear a striking resemblance. We've seen the beast! It is a tremendous creature of the reptilian class, with a head like the savages, and a squat body with a long, bone-studded tail. The Triceratops is to these creatures what the great ape is to our kind. Here man-like beings sprang from the animal triceratopsids, as the humans sprang from the simians of our world, resulting in the creation of a Triceratopsian culture over which Hokar rules."

"Well, cheer up, we die in the jaws of the Triceratops when the mists dear tomorrow," said Bright. "Unless the *Annihilator* shows up before that time, I guess our bones go to the Triceratopsian brats!"

Professor Donalsen shuddered and sucked in his breath.

"The Triceratops will leave no bones to be picked, friend," he said.

"Have you tried to get loose?" Bob asked suddenly.

The scientist laughed harshly.

"Certainly, but it is futile! Brandt had Dr Jorgenssen flogged for even trying. They watch us almost constantly, waiting like carrion for one of us to die!"

For the next few minutes the explorers talked among themselves; Bob hung his head resignedly with thoughts of Joan uppermost in his mind. Strangely he did not worry much about his own life. He dreaded more the shock she would suffer when he failed to return or if word was handed to her telling of his death. But that seemed unavoidable now. He must pay with his life for the apparent injustice of man-made laws and civilization against one man—whose broodings had created within him an insane hatred for all mankind.

CHAPTER VIII

OTHER VICTIMS

THE sun in this strange interior world did not set like the sun of the Solar System. Instead it seemed to stand almost overhead now like a fixed star of the proportions of the moon as seen from the surface. A foggy mist was beginning to form an obscuring photosphere around it, not hiding it entirely, but causing the sphere to glow like a cold, clammy ball.

Days and nights here were determined by the clouds of mists that formed over the central sun with as unceasing regularity as our own solar sun slips down in the west to herald the approach of night, and rises again in the east with the dawn of a new day. And the disk looked as cold and chilly as an arctic moon, but Bob Allison felt no change in temperature when the central sun became almost hidden from his view by the mists.

Strangely, the climate did not vary, remaining as fixed as the interior sun itself. He watched the clouds for a time and then the ghostly shadows that danced around him on all sides with the fall of a deadly gloom over the domain of Hoka. Shadows were everywhere, lurking like evil spectres in the corners of the stockade. An interior night was at last on hand and the jungles seemed to awaken to it by creating a ceaseless din.

Those in the stockade shuddered when they heard the terrifying scream of a saber-toothed tiger. Great mastodons were evidently crashing through the matted brush on all sides of Hoka's city of mud mounds. Huge insects droned overhead in swarms. Batlike birds with membraned wings flapped dismally over the open stockade like great carrion. Some of them hesitated in their slow, deliberate flight, and circled the stockade. One flew very close, and Bob saw its eyes flashing like fire-flecked rubies as it surveyed the scene below.

Then, suddenly Hoka's city went into pandemonium! Those within the stockade were terrified by the gutturals that came from innumerable Triceratopsian throats. The sounds harmonized with the beastly grunts, screams and groans that emanated in the jungles beyond the town, but they were now so close that the doomed humans were horrified. What was happening, anyhow? Was the *Annihilator* returning? Had it been spotted by the Triceratopsians, creating uncontrolled excitement among them? Bob was soon to learn the reason for the excitement.

After a time, the stockade gates were swung open again and in marched a dozen humans guarded by a squad of Hoka's warriors. They were immediately pegged out against the wall adjacent to the two officers, and deserted. The gates crashed shut and presently the town became still again. Hoka's thousand warriors had returned from their raid on the *Annihilator* and they had brought with them what remained of the scouting party!

Instinctively, Bob counted them as they were pegged out, keeping silent through the entire process. Then he heard the men swearing and cursing the hand of Fate that had led them into the claws of these brutes. Bob remained silent until after the gates closed; then, staring into the gloom, he addressed his men. Bright had been dozing and was too stupefied to make a sound.

"What happened, men?" tensely Bob asked. "Can you see me?"

He was aware that all heads had been turned in his direction and all eyes were staring at him. Then he heard the nearest man gasp excitedly.

"Commander Allison!" the man ejaculated in amazement.

"Yes, I am Allison," said Bob softly, peering at the shadowy forms.

"We thought you were killed when the herd of elephants stampeded, sir," the man gasped. "Then, under command of Lieutenant Backus we retreated

back toward the *Annihilator*. But when we reached the meadow we found the ship was being attacked by the savages. They had somehow brought a great herd of huge mastodons into the fight and hurled them at the *Annihilator*. The animals would have wrecked her in no time with their heavy charging, and the ship took off for protection. We were captured after a fight; Lieutenant Backus and Professor Marble were speared. We left twenty-three dead on the ground!"

"Backus and Marble killed?" Lieutenant-Commander Bright interjected suddenly.

"Killed at the first skirmish. Dr. Ralston and Sergeant Ringer were so badly wounded that they were left on the ground to die! Ringer had an arrow through his chest and Ralston was run through by a spear!"

"Yeah!" volunteered a man next in line "And the devils drank the blood of the dead and left the dying to the carrion."

"My God!" groaned Bob, blanching "That's terrible!"

"Terrible is right, sir!" the man admitted. "But what's going to happen to us?"

"I . . . I . . . I don't know, men," Bob said dismally. "Lieutenant-Commander Bright and myself are condemned to die in a few hours. What's left of the Swedes are here, too, awaiting death. You'll probably follow!"

The men groaned. Every ear had heard and then from across the stockade came the brave voice of Professor Donalsen.

"If we could get loose, Commander Allison," he said in low tones, "there's enough of us to put up a good fight and go down like men!"

Bob tugged savagely at his bonds and felt them give just a trifle, but the fiber thongs bit into his flesh and held. He grunted with pain and gave it up.

"Good idea, professor!" he gritted. "But get loose first! It can't be done!"

The Coming of Dawn

Long before the mists vanished from around the central sun, Hoka's city was awake. The din of the jungles had subsided slowly after a time and, as an interior morning dawned, became altogether silent. The Triceratopsians seemed to have worked themselves into a beastly silent frenzy during the gloomy night and had reached the climax as the shadows gradually lifted from the town.

They made terrifying sounds now outside the stockade and the pounding of countless feet on the hard-packed earth around the council-house told those within the pen that they were stamping a savage ritual. It seemed that their number had increased three-fold during the night, and now the mounded city was in an uproar.

The humans, pegged out for slaughter or sacrifice, had spent a terrible

night. Every time Bob's eyes dosed in sleep, he was rudely awakened by the bite of the thongs into his wrists as he sagged inert. After a while he gave up all thought of rest and contented himself with standing erect. Bright swore for hours to relieve his mind and stood awake beside his superior officer.

Gradually, the mists cleared from the central sun and it began to glow like a ball of red fire, causing steam to rise from the jungles in clouds, dissolving slowly in the atmosphere which reeked with decaying carrion and other terrible smells of the town. All night Bob had watched the space overhead for a glimpse of the *Annihilator II*, hoping the hope of a doomed man that she would heave into view and rescue them. But the *Annihilator* seemed to have deserted the interior world entirely for she did not appear.

Then, presently the stockade gates swung open and a dozen Triceratopsian warriors swung rapidly in. They went at once to the two officers, whom they cuffed cruelly with raking claws, before releasing them from the stockade. The warriors then closed around them in an impenetrable circle and marched them out of the pen.

As they went, Bob glanced toward his men. They were lighting at their bonds, trying to get loose. Groaning and swearing, they hurled vile epithets at the grotesque fighters of Hoken's tribe. The Triceratopsians paid no attention to them. As they passed the Swedish scientists, the unfortunate men began to yell loudly in protest. The cries were taken up by the American flyers, and the stockade was in a sudden bedlam.

But the Triceratopsians looked neither to right nor to left. They went about their business like mechanical men, carrying out the will of some superior mastermind.

A great throng of savages was on hand to greet the victims with hostile sneers, snarling grunts and savage gutturals. To Bob and Bright it seemed that the whole jungle had suddenly become on friendly terms with one another and had congregated to watch the annihilation of the condemned strangers. A wide aisle was made in the crowd and the two officers were led through it past the great council-house to what appeared to be a tremendous amphitheater on the edge of the town.

In the center of a depression stood a huge, barred cage, and in it was a huge, terrifying beast with a head like the savages of Hoken's band and the body of some great, scaly lizard!

Bob shuddered when he beheld the thing. Saliva, as red as blood, dribbled from its mouth, and when it caught the scent of the two humans, it lowered its great head and grunted thunderously, pawing the earth like a maddened bull. The sacred Triceratops was ready to pounce upon the two officers and devour them like flies in the jaws of a dog!

As they strode swiftly toward the cage, Bright suddenly faltered. Two giant Triceratopsians grasped him by the arms and hustled him forward. A vicious kick sent him sprawling on his face. Bob rushed forward and picked him up. Bright was blubbering like a frightened infant. His nerve had clean snapped and hurled him on the verge of insanity. But Bob kept cool. For no nameable reason, he had a hunch that the Triceratops was going to be cheated. During the past few moments his hopes had been strangely lifted from the depths. He faced the situation with a grin, looking upon it as an adventure from which he would be snatched when the jaws of death yawned open for him.

"Buck up, Bright!" he said. "Cripes! A man only dies once, and it'll all be over in a minute. Stick out your chest, old man, and think about the *Annihilator* coming!"

"I've given up all hope, Allison!" Bright moaned. "I'll go completely crazy in another minute, I'm not ready to die . . . I've got a family . . . kids and all, back in Kitty Hawk. What'll become of them when I'm gone!"

"Don't worry about that, Bright," Bob soothed. "Uncle Sam always takes care of the families of its men. They'll be provided for!"

Bright broke down now and wept. Bob placed an arm around his shoulder and held him up. The first officer was on the verge of complete collapse. He could have died with a grin in a fight, but facing such a terrifying beast as the Triceratops, whose jaws bellowed for his flesh, was something else again and his nerve quit him.

Within twenty feet of the cage the procession halted. From the side came Hokar, followed by Brandt and a double line of Triceratopsian priests. Hokar was adorned in a flowing robe of feathers making him look like some strutting bird with the head of a beast. Brandt was likewise adorned and he grinned evilly as he quick-stepped to the side of the chief. In their rear, the grotesque priests, each carrying a skull-crowned scepter and painted hideously in red streaks, maintained a grunting chant that rose and fell with a two-toned menace.

Then the drums began to throb in the village. They increased in volume until the plain thundered. The rumble smote upon the officer's ears like the steady crash of high-explosives. Bob held his hands over his ears for a moment's relief. Bright ignored the sounds as though lost in his own terrified emotions. As a result of Bob's urging, he banished his tears and finally faced death like an officer and a man, stiff and rigid, calm and aloof.

Hokar paused in front of them. Brandt leered and the priests circled in crescent formation behind them. Bob heard a sudden high-sounding hiss and looked up mechanically. It sounded like the drone of the *Annihilator's*

exhausts. But the space over his head was fathomless and empty. Brandt laughed loudly at the move and then scowled.

“You needn’t hope for your ship to return, dog!” he said. “She’s gone—scared away! I’m told she quit this world entirely and returned to your filthy civilization!”

Bob glowered at him for an instant and then deliberately spat in his face. Brandt sprang forward at once, jerking at the ancient pistol that dangled at his belt. But free from bonds as he now was, Bob quickly stepped forward and hurled his right fist with all his strength at the renegade’s writhing features. It collided with Brandt’s temple and sent him sprawling. Allison would have been shot on the spot for his act had not Hoka placed a clawed hand on Brandt’s shoulder and shoved him off balance. An iron slug from his hand-made cartridges whined past Bob’s ear and thudded into the broad, scaly chest of a warrior behind him. The Triceratopsian grunted and wilted. He got up, stared about him stupidly and vanished in the crowd that had followed.

Hoka emitted a few guttural snarlings at his lieutenant and then knelt down before the two officers. He scraped his bony head on the ground, snarling like a wolf. The priests continued their chanting and Hoka stood erect. Brandt rose and scowled, menacingly, but made no further attempts to cheat the Triceratops.

Wreaths of damp club-mosses were placed on the officers’ heads by two priests. This ceremony was followed by a guttural incantation, and the savage ritual was ended. Hoka bowed again and slowly strode away. Brandt bent over in mock reverence and hurried after the chief. They took up a position on the edge of the amphitheater depression and stood majestically surrounded by the priests. Bob and Bright were led closer to the cage by four warriors. Around the saucer surged the population of the town and the visitors who had come in during the night.

Two Triceratopsians went to the cage and pulled out the lock-peg. The door swung open of its own weight as the warriors raced away to the safety of higher ground. Bob and Bright were left standing alone before the open cage. The Triceratops pawed the earth and came crawling into the open, head lowered, eyes glaring, and blood dripping from its mouth. Then the beast charged like an express train, straight toward the horrified officers!

CHAPTER IX

THE ANNIHILATOR COMES!

TOO horror-stricken to move, Bob and Bright stood rooted to the ground and stared at the oncoming beast. The ground under their feet seemed to throb under the weight of the Triceratops. Then, suddenly realizing that death was almost upon them, Bob gave Bright a powerful shove out of the brute's path, and then leapt aside himself. As he did so, he heard disappointed grunts from the Triceratopsians standing on the higher ground, who were watching with the lust for blood. But Allison paid little attention to them now. He was fighting to keep away from the giant creature . . . the idol of this prehistoric world.

Scarcely had he stepped aside than the Triceratops thundered past. As it went it lashed out with its thorny tail and droned over Bob's head with a scant few inches to spare. Bright picked himself up from the ground, stared around him, and began to run. The Triceratops spun around like lightning, bellowed once and pursued him. Waving his arms wildly to distract the attention of the maddened beast from the running first officer, Bob saw Bright dash around the cage and reappear on the opposite side. The Triceratops was almost upon him. Then—an unexpected thing happened.

With scarcely ten feet to go before closing its great jaws around Bright, the Triceratops was seen to falter suddenly to its fore-knees. Instantly there was a muffled explosion and the brute's head appeared to explode in bloody fragments! Its tail lashing madly, its body jerking in violent convulsions, the Triceratops lay headless upon the ground.

Dazed, Bob stared at it for an instant and then raced toward Bright. They came together and crouched.

"Someone's shot the brute, Bright!" Bob cried.

"Look! God! We're saved!" shouted Bright, looking up. High overhead was a long, silvery body, glistening like a needle, in the glare of the sun. "The *Annihlator!*"

Bob glanced upward.

The *Annihlator* was circling high above and coming closer with each passing instant! The ship was dropping down over the domain of Hekar, a single stream of flame roaring like a waterfall from her tail exhausts.

Shut in on all sides by a ring of Triceratopsians, Bob and Bright glared around them for some avenue of escape. They expected the savages to swoop down upon them at any instant to claw them to shreds. But the beasts seemed too stupefied at the sudden death of their monstrous idol to

act. They stared upon the scene dumbly, and then Bob heard Brandt's high-pitched voice urging them into the depression.

As he looked around him, Bob suddenly realized that the explosive projectile that had killed the Triceratops had not come from the high-flying Annihilator. The ship had been too high for such accuracy, and the missile had come from a pistol! Someone armed with a regulation government pistol was in the neighborhood to protect them from the jaws of the beast! Who could it be? Certainly, none of the men in the stockade were armed; and they couldn't have shot the beast if they had been, because Bob had left them trussed against the walls and there was no escaping the bonds. Besides, all pistols and rifles had been taken by the Triceratopsians!

Hardly had the mystery of the beast's death entered his mind than six rapid-fire explosions sounded in back of him. They both swung around instantly in the direction of Hoken and his priests.

Hoken, his body torn to shreds, lay upon the ground in an inert, bloody heap! Around him lay the still bodies of five of his priests. Brandt stood like a stone image beside his fallen leader, mouth agape, astonished. The sudden turn of events appeared to have stunned him. Then pandemonium seized the crowd. The whole horde broke into savage cries of fright and raced back toward the town.

Overhead, the *Annihilator* floated majestically. From her aerial torpedo tubes arranged just under her airfoils shot a sudden stream of black cylinders. Bob watched them race earthward. He was hurled flat on his face when the first of the torpedoes were exploded in the midst of the running horde.

"They'll blow hell out of the stockade, Bright!" Bob groaned, lying on his stomach a dozen feet from the beheaded Triceratops.

"Can't be helped if they do, Commander," said Bright, breathing heavily. "But I don't think they'll hit it, because the observers have probably spotted those within!"

Some strange instinct warned Bob Allison of approaching disaster in his rear. The peculiar sense that tells men that they are being watched or stalked, told him that danger still lurked near him despite the fact that the whole Triceratopsian horde was in terrorized flight. He rolled over on his back suddenly and leaped erect.

The Man in Disguise

Brandt, his eyes flashing with an evil, deadly light, was advancing cautiously toward him, pistol in hand and ready to fire!

With a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach, Bob crouched instinctively. Bright sucked in his breath and sat up; his face suddenly pale. Brandt laughed like an insane creature and flipped his pistol in line with Bob's head.

"I'm going to drop you, young fellow," he snapped, "then plug your mate! I'm not going to be cheated! You'll pay—you'll both pay! I've prepared for just such a thing as an air raid! Your ship can't touch me! Are you ready to take it between the eyes now?"

"Don't be a fool, Brandt!" said Bob excitedly. "Lay off and you'll be pardoned by the government! We can straighten out your case!"

"No, you can't!" Brandt growled, bestially. "I wouldn't take a pardon if you could do it! I quit your civilization years ago and I'm still quits! Hear me? Down on your knees, young feller."

"Can't you listen to reason, Brandt?" Bob appealed futilely. The man was undoubtedly crazy and would kill him in cold blood despite his pleading.

Brandt cackled like an idiot and then scowled. "Down on your knees, young feller!" he hissed again. "Down so I can watch you grovel at my feet!"

"You can go to hell then, Brandt," Bob snapped, bunching his muscles to spring at the insane convict. "I grovel at no man's feet!"

He heard the ancient pistol's mechanism click as the hammer was drawn back. A shudder surged through his body as he lurched forward like a cornered beast. Brandt's pistol roared in his face. He felt a sharp pain shooting through his shoulder and a black nausea clutching at his brain. But he fought to keep his faculties and groped blindly for the whiskered throat in front of him.

Blinded by a screen of red, savage under the influence of an uncontrollable anger, Bob Allison heard the pistol roar again and then his fingers encountered a grizzled throat. With all the strength at his command, he closed them tightly into the yielding throat of his insane enemy.

Brandt brought his gun down upon Bob's shoulder with terrific force. Bob felt the strength fleeing from his fingers. The pistol fell again and his hands came away from that savage throat. He heard Brandt chuckling as he fell and cringed to stay the shock of an expected bullet. He closed his eyes and groaned; then suddenly came a muffled explosion. He felt something wet and heavy strike him in the face. Bright yelled and he opened his eyes.

What he beheld caused him a horrible nausea. Brandt's ancient body lay in mangled bloody tatters in front of him! An explosive missile had blown him to pieces. Sick, his senses swimming, Bob rose and wiped his face. His hands came away blood-stained. Striding swiftly toward them from the opposite side of the depression was the figure of a Triceratopsian. He held a pistol in a human hand and it was smoking!

Awed and wholly uncomprehending, Bob and Bright watched the approaching figure, amazed at the white hands that protruded strangely from

underneath a scaled cloak. Then as the thing approached, they saw him shove the pistol into a cartridge belt and literally tug at his head.

They saw the head of a Triceratopsian torn from scaled shoulders and before them stood the grinning form of Sergeant Ringer!

"Ringer!" Bob and Bright gasped together.

"At your service, sirs!" said Sergeant Ringer, saluting.

"What in hell's the idea, Sergeant?" Bob exploded with a ring of joy in his voice. "We were told you had been left wounded back on the meadow!"

"I was wounded, sir," Ringer said, slipping out of the skin of a Triceratopsian warrior and casting it aside with a look of loathing. "But not so bad as the devils thought! An arrow punctured me on the chest, causing a lot of blood to spill but doing little damage. But Ralston died shortly after the savages left us!"

"Sergeant," said Bob extending his blood-stained hand, "you'll be cited and promoted for this, sir! How did you do it?"

Sergeant Ringer blushed under smears of Triceratopsian blood and stood at attention.

"Just an old trick, sir," he said. "I played the role of wolf in sheep's clothing! When the devils left the meadow, I skinned one of their dead and draped it around me to make me look like one of them. Then I trailed 'em through the jungle to the town. I hid all night in a hole not far from here and waited my chance to get among them without creating suspicion. After they took you from the stockade, I slipped in and turned the other men loose. They told me you were to be sacrificed and I just happened to get here in time to shoot the animal as it bore down upon Mr. Bright. To scare the lot I blasted the big fellow over there, and then watched this white man stalk you. I held my fire, thinking you'd want to settle with him yourself, until he got the top hand, and then I let him have it, sir!"

"You're a very brave man, Sergeant!" said Bright. "A very brave man, indeed! Sergeant, I salute you, sir!"

Lieutenant-Commander Bright stood suddenly at attention and lifted his right hand in a stiff salute. Sergeant Ringer blushed and returned it.

"Where are the men from the stockade?" Bob inquired, grinning, his hands trembling.

"They're concentrated on the edge of the town, sir, just within the jungle," said Ringer. "Some of them are armed, for I brought three pistols with me. They're safe, providing the *Annihilator* doesn't plant a torpedo among them!"

Overhead, the *Annihilator* hovered like a tremendous bird and spread death into the Triceratopsian town. The world inside of the Earth trembled with each deafening explosion of aerial torpedoes. Then after a time the

huge craft dropped lower and the three men, safe in the depression, heard the rattle of machine gunfire. The ship's guns hissed and rattled, sending explosive messengers of death into the Triceratopsians who, without a leader, went mad with fright.

A savage raced down into the amphitheater suddenly to escape the deadly fire from the *Annihilator*. Sergeant Ringer lifted his pistol and sent him to death without hesitation. Eventually the three climbed to higher ground to survey the damage.

Hokar's horde was broken; his town lay in devastation. Great holes yawned like craters in it where the powerful torpedoes had exploded. Bloody masses lay on every side. The *Annihilator* had done her work well. Hokar would never increase his strength for a raid on the civilized world! His savage warriors were almost exterminated, even as he himself had been killed instantaneously by Sergeant Ringer's deadly pistol.

The *Annihilator* had played her part for mankind in preventing some future catastrophe. She had played her role, unconscious of the fact that she was wiping out mankind's most terrible enemies. But she had not performed without losses. Thirty-five of her men lay dead on the meadow.

After the *Annihilator* had landed in the center of the devastation she had wrought, she took on the lost Swedish explorers, the two officers and the remainder of the ill-fated scouting party. Then she went at once to the meadow, where a party was landed to bury the remains that were left after the savage beasts of the jungle had gorged. The *Annihilator II* planted an American flag above them and proclaimed the world on the interior a possession of the United States of America. And who could deny her right to it, after she had conquered it? Certainly, the Swedish explorers made no objection.

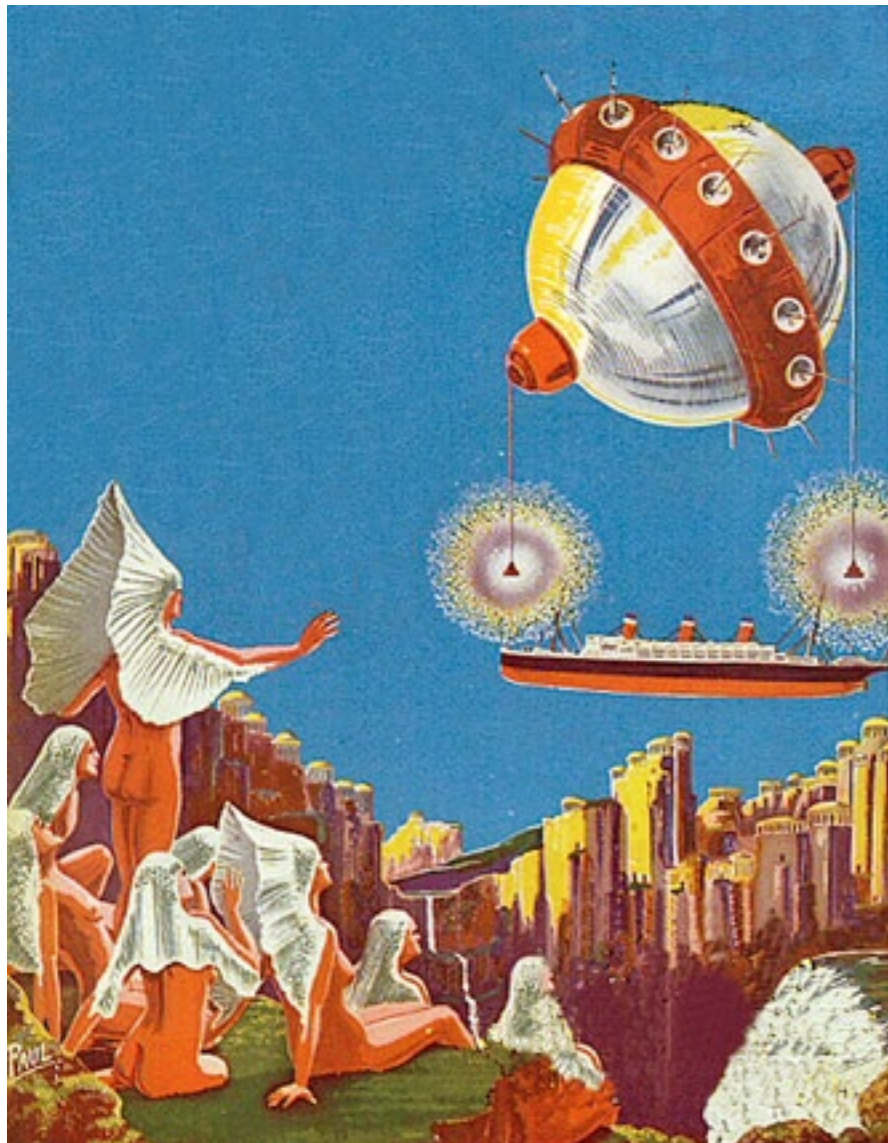
After a brief ceremony over which Bob Allison officiated, the *Annihilator II* set her course for the surface and eventually emerged under the brilliant rays of the arctic sun. She streaked across above the fields of ice, in a straight course for Markham Island, where the two radio-television men were picked up. She ultimately reached Kitty Hawk, where every man was hailed as a hero.

But in Joan's eyes, Commander Bob Allison was the greatest of them all, and a great celebration took place throughout the nation when the two were joined in marriage by the chaplain at Kitty Hawk.

THE END.

THE VOICE FROM THE INNER WORLD

By A. Hyatt Verrill



ON the eighteenth of October, the New York papers reported the appearance of a remarkable meteor which had been seen in mid-Pacific, and the far more startling announcement that it was feared that the amazing celestial visitor had struck and destroyed a steamship.

"At eleven-fifteen last evening," read the account in the *Herald*, "the Panama-Hawaiian Line steamship *Chiriqui* reported by radio the appearance of an immense meteor which suddenly appeared above the horizon to the southeast, and which increased rapidly in size and brilliance. Within ten minutes from the time the phenomenon was first sighted, it appeared as a huge greenish sphere of dazzling brilliance high in the sky, and heading, apparently, directly for the *Chiriqui*. Almost at the same time as reported by the *Chiriqui*, several other ships, among them the Miners and Merchants Line *Vulcan*, and the Japanese liner *Fujiama Maru* also reported the meteorite, although they were more than one thousand miles apart and equidistant from the position of the *Chiriqui*.

"In the midst of a sentence describing the appearance of the rapidly approaching meteor, the *Chiriqui's* wireless message came to an abrupt end, and all attempts to get into further communication with her operator failed. The other vessels reported that a scintillating flash, like an explosion, was followed by the meteor's disappearance, and it is feared that the immense aerolite may have struck the *Chiriqui*, and utterly destroyed her with all on board. As no S.O.S. has been received, and as the ship's radio broke off with the words: 'It is very close and the sea is as bright as day. Below the immense mass of green fire are two smaller spheres of intense red. It is so near we can hear it roaring like a terrific wind. It is headed—' It is probable that the vessel, if struck, was instantly destroyed. It has been suggested, however, that it is possible that the meteor or meteors were accompanied by electrical phenomena which may have put the *Chiriqui's* wireless apparatus out of commission and that the ship may be safe."

Later editions of the press announced that no word had been received from the *Chiriqui*, that other ships had reported the meteor, and that two of these had radioed that the aerolite, instead of exploding, had been seen to continue on its way and gradually disappear beyond the horizon. These reports somewhat allayed the fears that the *Chiriqui* had been struck by the meteor, and prominent scientists expressed the opinion that the supposed explosion had been merely an optical illusion caused by its passage through some dense or cloudy layer of air. They also quoted numerous cases of immense meteors having been seen by observers over immense distances, and

declared their belief that the aerolite had not reached the earth, but had merely passed through the outer atmosphere. When asked regarding the possibility of the meteor having affected the ship's wireless apparatus, experts stated that such might have been the case, although, hitherto, severe electrical disturbances had never been associated with the passage of meteors. Moreover, they declared that even if the wireless had been injured, it could have been repaired in a few hours, and that they could not explain the continued silence of the *Chiriqui*. Word also came from Panama that the naval commandant at Balboa had dispatched a destroyer to search for the *Chiriqui*, or any survivors of the catastrophe if the ship had been destroyed.

A few hours later, dispatches were received from various points in Central and South America, reporting the meteor of the previous night. All of these agreed that the fiery mass had swept across the heavens in a wide arc and had vanished in the east beyond the summits of the Andes.

It was, therefore, fairly certain that the *Chiriqui* had not been struck by the meteor, and in a few days the incident was completely forgotten by the public at large.

But when, ten days later, the warship reported that no sign of the missing ship could be found, and the officials of the Panama-Hawaiian Line admitted that the *Chiriqui* was four days overdue, interest was again aroused. Then came the startling news, featured in screaming headlines, that the meteor or its twin had been again reported by various ships in the Pacific, and that the U. S. S. *McCracken*, which had been scouring the seas for traces of the missing *Chiriqui*, had sent in a detailed report of the meteor's appearance, and that her wireless had gone "dead," exactly as had that of the *Chiriqui*.

And when, after every effort, no communication could be established with the war vessel, and when two weeks had elapsed without word from her, it was generally conceded that both ships had been destroyed by the amazing celestial visitor. For a time, the double catastrophe filled the papers to the exclusion of nearly everything else, and such everyday features as scandals and murder trials were crowded to the back pages of the dailies to make room for long articles on meteors and missing ships and interviews with scientists. But as no more meteors appeared, and as no more ships vanished, the subject gradually lost interest and was no longer news.

About three months after the first report of the green meteor appeared (on January fifteenth, to be exact) I was in Peru, visiting my daughter, when I received a communication of such an utterly amazing character that it appeared incredible, and yet was so borne out by facts and details that it had all the earmarks of truth. So astounding was this communication that, despite the fact that it will unquestionably be scoffed at by the public, I feel

that it should be given to the world. As soon as I had received the story, I hurried with it to the American Minister in Lima, and related all that I had heard. He agreed with me that the authorities at Washington should be acquainted with the matter at once, and together we devoted many hours to coding the story which was cabled in the secret cipher of the State Department. The officials, however, were inclined to regard the matter as a hoax, and, as far as I am aware, no steps have yet been taken to follow out the suggestions contained in the communication which I received, and thus save humanity from a terrible fate. Personally, I am convinced that the amazing tale which came to me in such an astounding and unexpected manner is absolutely true, incredible as it may seem, but whether fact or fiction, my readers may decide for themselves.

My son-in-law was intensely interested in radio, and devoted all of his spare time to devising and constructing receiving sets, and in his home in the delightful residential suburb of Miraflores, were a number of receiving sets of both conventional and original design. Having been closely in touch with the subject for several years, I was deeply interested in Frank's experiments, and especially in a new type of hook-up which had given most remarkable results in selectivity and distance. Practically every broadcasting station in America, and many in Europe, had been logged by the little set, and on several occasions faint signals had been heard which, although recognizable as English, evidently emanated from a most remote station. These, oddly enough, had come in at the same hour each night, and each time had continued for exactly the same length of time.

We were discussing this, and trying to again pick up the unintelligible and unidentified signals on that memorable January evening, when, without warning, and as clearly as though sent from the station at Buenos Aires, came the most astounding communication which ever greeted human ears, and which, almost verbatim, was as follows: ^[*]

"Listen! For God's sake, I implore all who may hear my words to listen! And believe what I say no matter how unbelievable it may seem, for the fate

[*] The message as it came in, was halting, and interrupted, with many unintelligible words and repetitions, as if the sender were laboring under an intense strain or was an amateur. For the sake of clarity and continuity, the communication has been edited and filled in, but not altered in any detail.

The metropolitan papers reported the meteor on the eighteenth and stated it was observed by those on the *Chiriqui* on the evening of the seventeenth, but it must be remembered that the *Chiriqui* was in the western Pacific and hence had gained a day in time.

of thousands of human beings, the fate of the human race may depend upon you who by chance may hear this message from another world. My name is James Berry, my home is Butte, Montana, my profession a mining engineer, and I am speaking through the short-wave transmitter of the steamship *Chiriqui* on which I was a passenger when the terrible, the incredible events occurred which I am about to relate. On the evening of October sixteenth the *Chiriqui* was steaming across the Pacific in calm weather when our attention was attracted by what appeared to be an unusually brilliant meteor of a peculiar greenish color. It first appeared above the horizon to the south-east, and very rapidly increased in size and brilliancy. At the time I was particularly struck by the fact that it left no trail of light or fire behind it, as is usual with large meteorites, but so rapidly did it approach that I had little time to wonder at this. Within a few moments from the time that it was first seen, the immense sphere of green incandescence had grown to the size of the moon, and the entire sea for miles about our ship was illuminated by a sickly green light. It appeared to be headed directly towards our ship, and, standing as I was on the bridge-deck near the wheel-house, I heard the chief officer cry out: 'My God, it will strike us!' By now the mass of fire had altered in appearance, and a short distance below the central green mass could be seen two smaller spheres of blinding red, like huge globes of molten metal. By now, too, the noise made by the meteor was plainly audible, sounding like the roar of surf or the sound of a tornado.

"Everyone aboard the ship was panic-stricken; women screamed, men cursed and shouted, and the crew rushed to man the boats, as everyone felt that the *Chiriqui* was doomed. What happened next, I can scarcely describe, so rapidly did the events occur. As the meteor seemed about to hurl itself upon the ship, there was a blinding flash of light, a terrific detonation, and I saw men and women falling to the decks as if struck down by shell fire. The next instant the meteor vanished completely, and intense blackness followed the blinding glare. At the same moment, I was aware of a peculiar pungent, suffocating odor which, perhaps owing to my long experience with deadly gases in mining work, I at once recognized as some noxious gas. Almost involuntarily, and dully realizing that by some miracle the ship had escaped destruction, I dashed below and reached my cabin almost overcome by the fumes which now penetrated every portion of the ship. Among my possessions was a new type of gas-mask which had been especially designed for mine work, and my idea was to don this, for I felt sure that the meteor had exploded close to the ship and had released vast quantities of poisonous gases which might hang about for a long time.

"Although almost overcome by the choking fumes, I managed to find and

put on the apparatus, for one of its greatest advantages was the rapidity and ease with which it could be adjusted, it having been designed for emergency use. But before it was fairly in place over my face, the electric light in my room went out and I was in complete darkness. Also, the ship seemed strangely still, and as I groped my way to the stateroom door it suddenly dawned upon me that the engines had stopped, that there was no longer the whirr of dynamos from the depths of the hull. Not a light glimmered in the passageway, and twice, as I felt my way towards the social hall, I stumbled over the sprawled bodies of men, while in the saloon itself, I several times stepped upon the soft and yielding flesh of passengers who lay where they had been struck down by the poisonous gas. In all probability, I thought, I was the sole survivor aboard the ship, unless some of the firemen and engineers survived, and I wondered how I would manage to escape, if the vessel should be sighted by some other ship, or if it should be my gruesome task to search the *Chiriqui* from stem to stern, drag the bodies of the dead to the deck and cast them into the sea, and remain—perhaps for weeks—alone upon the ship until rescued by some passing vessel. But as I reached the door and stepped upon the deck all such thoughts were driven from my brain as I blinked my eyes and stared about in dumfounded amazement. I had stepped from Stygian darkness into dazzling light. Blinded for the moment, I closed my eyes, and when I again opened them, I reeled to the rail with a cry of terror. Poised above the ship's masts, and so enormous that it appeared to shut out half the sky, was the stupendous meteor like a gigantic globe of green fire, and seemingly less than one hundred feet above me. Still nearer, and hanging but a few yards above the bow and stern of the ship, were the two smaller spheres of glowing red. Cowering against the rail, expecting to be shriveled into a charred cinder at any instant, I gazed transfixed and paralyzed at the titanic masses of flaming light above the ship.

"Then reason came back to me. My only chance to escape was to leap into the sea, and I half clambered upon the rail prepared to take the plunge. A scream, like that of a madman, came from my lips. Below me was no sign of the waves, but a limitless void, while, immeasurably distant beneath the ship, I could dimly see the crinkled surface of the sea. The *Chiriqui* was floating in space!

"It was impossible, absolutely preposterous, and I felt convinced that I had gone mad, or that the small quantity of gas I had breathed had affected my brain and had induced the nightmarish vision. Perhaps, I thought, the meteors above the ship were also visionary, and I again stared upward. Then, I knew that I was insane. The spheres of green and red light were rushing upward as I could see by the brilliant stars studding the sky, and

the ship upon which I stood was following in their wake! Weak, limp as a rag, I slumped to the deck and lay staring at the great globes above me. But the insanely impossible events which had crowded upon my overwrought senses were as nothing to the amazing discovery I now made.

“As my eyes became accustomed to the glare of the immense green sphere, I saw that instead of being merely a ball of fire it had definite form. About its middle extended a broad band from which slender rods of light extended. Round or ovoid spots seemed placed in definite order about it, and from the extremities of its axes lines or cables, clearly outlined by the glare, extended downward to the red spheres above the ship. By now, I was so firmly convinced that I was irrational, that these new and absolutely stunning discoveries did not excite or surprise me in the least, and as if in a particularly vivid dream, I lay there gazing upward, and dully, half consciously speculating on what it all meant. Gradually, too, it dawned upon me that the huge sphere with its encircling band of duller light was rotating. The circular markings, which I thought were marvelously like the ports of a ship, were certainly moving from top to bottom of the sphere, and I could distinctly hear a low, vibrant humming.

“The next second I jerked upright with a start and my scalp tingled. Reason had suddenly returned to me. The thing was no meteor, no celestial body, but some marvelous machine, some devilish invention of man, some gigantic form of airship which—God only knew why—had by some incredible means captured the *Chiriqui*, had lifted the twenty thousand ton ship into the air and was bearing her off with myself, the only survivor of all the ship’s company, witnessing the miraculous happening! It was the most insane thought that had yet entered my brain, but I knew now for a certainty that I was perfectly sane, and, oddly enough, now that I was convinced that the catastrophe which had overtaken the *Chiriqui* was the devilish work of human beings, I was no longer frightened and my former nightmarish terror of things unknown, gave place to the most intense anger and an inexpressible hatred of the fiends who, without warning or reason, had annihilated hundreds of men and women by means of this new and irresistible engine of destruction. But I was helpless. Alone upon the stolen and stricken ship I could do nothing. By what tremendous force the spherical airship was moving through space, by what unknown power it was lifting the ship and carrying it, —slung like the gondola of a Zeppelin beneath the sphere, —were matters beyond my comprehension. Calmly, now that I felt assured that I was rational and was the victim of my fellow men—fiendish as they might be, —I walked aft to where one red sphere hung a few yards above the ship’s deck.

“There seemed no visible connection between it and the vessel, but I no-

ticed that everything movable upon the deck, the iron cable, the wire ropes, the coiled steel lines of the after derrick, all extended upward from the deck, as rigid as bars of metal, while crackling blue sparks like electrical discharges scintillated from the ship's metal work below the red sphere. Evidently, I decided, the red mass was actuated by some form of electrical energy or magnetism, and I gave the area beneath it a wide berth. Retracing my way to the bow of the ship, I found similar conditions there. As I walked towards the waist of the ship again, I mounted the steps to the bridge, hoping from that height to get a better view of the monstrous machine holding the *Chiriqui* captive. I knew that in the chart-house I would find powerful glasses with which to study the machine. Upon the bridge the bodies of the quartermaster, the first officer and an apprentice lay sprawled grotesquely, and across the chart-house door lay the captain. Reaching down I lifted him by the shoulders to move him to one side, and to my amazement I discovered that he was not dead. His heart beat, his pulse, though slow and faint, was plain, he was breathing and his face, still ruddy, was that of a sleeping man rather than of a corpse.

"A wild thought rushed through my brain, and hastily I rushed to the other bodies. There was no doubt of it. All were alive and merely unconscious. The gas had struck them down, but had not killed them, and it came to me as a surprise, though I should long before have realized it, that the fumes had been purposely discharged by the beings who had captured the vessel. Possibly, I mentally decided, they had made a mistake and had failed in their intention to destroy the persons upon the ship, or again, was it not possible that they had intentionally rendered the ship's company unconscious, and had not intended to destroy their lives? Forgetting my original purpose in visiting the bridge, I worked feverishly to resuscitate the captain, but all to no purpose. Many gases, I knew, would render a man unconscious without actually injuring him, and I was also aware, that when under the influence of some of these, the victims could not be revived until the definite period of the gases' effect had passed. So, feeling certain that in due time the captain and the others would come to of their own accord, I entered the chart-room and, securing the skipper's binoculars, I again stepped upon the bridge. As I could not conveniently use the glasses with my gas-mask in place, and as I felt sure there was no longer any danger from the fumes, I started to remove the apparatus. But no sooner did a breath of the air enter my mouth than I hastily readjusted the contrivance, for the gas which had struck down everyone but myself was as strong as ever. Indeed, the mere whiff of the fumes made my head reel and swim, and I was forced to steady myself by grasping the bridge-rail until the dizzy spell passed.

“Once more myself, I focused the glasses as best I could upon the whirling sphere above the ship. But I could make out little more than by my naked eyes. The band about the center or equator of the globular thing was, I could now see, divided into segments, each of which bore a round, slightly convex, eye-like object from the centers of which extended slender rods which vibrated with incalculable speed. Indeed, the whole affair reminded me of the glass models of protozoans which I had seen in the American Museum of Natural History. These minute marine organisms I knew, moved with great rapidity by means of vibrating, hair-like appendages or cilia, and I wondered if the enormous spherical machine at which I was gazing, might not move through space in a similar manner by means of vibrating rods moving with such incredible speed that, slender as they were, they produced enormous propulsive power. Also, I could now see that the two extremities of the sphere, or as I may better express it, the axes, were equipped with projecting bosses or shafts to which the cables supporting the red spheres were attached. And as I peered through the glasses at the thing, the huge green sphere, which had been hitherto traveling on an even keel, or, in other words, with the central band vertical, now shifted its position and one end swung sharply upward, throwing the band about the centre at an acute angle. Involuntarily I grasped the rail of the bridge expecting to be thrown from my feet by the abrupt uptilting of the ship. But to my utter amazement the *Chiriqui* remained on an even plane and I then saw that as the sphere tilted, the cable at the uppermost axis ran rapidly out so that the two red spheres, which evidently supported the captive ship, remained in their original relative horizontal position. No sign of life was visible upon the machine above me, and I surmised that whoever might be handling the thing was within the sphere.

“Wondering how high we had risen above the sea, I stepped to the starboard end of the bridge and glanced down, and an involuntary exclamation escaped my lips. Far beneath the ship and clearly visible through the captain’s glasses was land! I could distinguish the white line marking surf breaking on a rocky shore, and ahead I could make out the cloud-topped, serried summits of a mighty range of mountains. Not until then did I realize the terrific speed at which the machine and captive vessel were traveling. I had been subconsciously aware that a gale had been blowing, but I had not stopped to realize that this was no ordinary wind, but was the rush of air caused by the rapidity of motion. But as I peered at the mountains through the binoculars, and saw the distant surface of the earth whizzing backward far beneath the *Chiriqui’s* keel, I knew that we were hurtling onward with the speed of the fastest scout airplane.

"Even as I gazed, the mountains seemed to rush towards me until, in a few minutes after I had first seen them, they appeared almost directly under the ship. Then the gigantic machine above me suddenly altered its course, it veered sharply to one side and swept along the range of summits far beneath. For some reason, just why I cannot explain, I dashed to the binnacle and saw that we were traveling to the south, and it flashed across my mind, that I had a dim recollection of noticing, when I first realized the nature of the machine which had been mistaken for a meteor, that by the stars, we were moving eastward. In that case, my suddenly alert mind told me, the land below must be some portion of America, and if so, judging by the altitude of the mountains, that they must be the Andes. All of this rushed through my brain instantly, and in the brief lapse of time in which I sprang to the binnacle and back to my observation point at the bridge-rail.

"Now, I saw, we were rapidly descending, and focusing my glasses upon the mountains, I made out an immense conical peak in the top of which was a gigantic black opening. Without doubt it was the crater of some stupendous extinct volcano, and, with a shock, I realized that the machine and the ship were headed directly for the yawning opening in the crater. The next instant we were dropping with lightning speed towards it, and so terrified and dumfounded had I become that I could not move from where I stood. Even before I could grasp the fact, the *Chiriqui* was enclosed by towering, rocky walls, inky blackness surrounded me, there was an upward breath-taking rush of air, a roar as of a thousand hurricanes. The *Chiriqui* rocked and pitched beneath my feet, as if in a heavy sea; I clung desperately to the bridge-rail for support and I felt sure that the ship had been dropped into the abysmal crater, that the next instant the vessel would crash into fragments as it struck bottom, or worse, that it would sink into the molten incandescent lava which might fill the depths of the volcano. For what seemed hours, the awful fall continued, though like as not the terrible suspense lasted for only a few minutes, and then, without warning, so abruptly that I lost my balance and was flung to the bridge, the ship ceased falling, an indescribable blue light succeeded the blackness, and unable to believe my senses I found the ship floating motionless, still suspended from the giant mechanism overhead, above a marvelous landscape.

"On every hand, as far as I could see, stretched jagged rocks, immense cliffs, stupendous crags and rugged knife-ridged hills of the most dazzling reds, yellows and purples. Mile-deep cañons cut the forbidding plains, which here and there showed patches of dull green, and in one spot I saw a stream of emerald-hued water pouring in a foaming cataract into a fathomless rift in the rock. But I gave little attention to these sights at the time. My

gaze was rivetted upon a strange, weird city which capped the cliffs close to the waterfall, and almost directly beneath the *Chiriqui*. Slowly we were dropping towards it, and I could see that the buildings which at first sight had appeared of immense height and tower-like form, were in reality gigantic basaltic columns capped with superimposed edifices of gleaming yellow.

"The next second the glasses dropped from my shaking, nerveless hands. Gathered on an open space of greenish plain were hundreds of human beings! But were they human? In form and features, as nearly as I could judge at that distance, they were human, but in color they were scarlet, and surmounting the head and extending along the arms to the elbows on every individual was a whitish, membranous frill, which at first sight reminded me of an Indian's war bonnet. The beings appeared to be of average height, but as the *Chiriqui's* keel touched solid ground and, keeling to one side, she rested upon one of her bilges, I saw with a shock, that the scarlet creatures were of gigantic size, fully thirty feet in height, and that, without exception, all were females! All were stark naked; but despite the frills upon their heads and shoulder despite their bizarre scarlet skins, despite their gigantic proportions, they were unquestionably human beings, women without doubt, and of the most perfect proportions, the most graceful forms and the most regular and even handsome features. Beside the stranded ship, they loomed as giants; but against the stupendous proportions of their land and city, they appeared no larger than ordinary mortals. By now they were streaming from their houses and even in the surprise and excitement of that moment I noticed that the giant rocky columns were perforated by windows and doors, and had obviously been hollowed out to form dwellings. Meantime, too, the huge machine which had captured the *Chiriqui*, had descended and was lying at rest, and no longer emitting its green light, upon a cradle erected near the waterfall, and from openings in its central band several of the scarlet, giant Amazons were emerging. How long, I wondered, would I remain undiscovered? How long would it be before one of the female giants spied me? And then, what would be my fate? Why had they captured the ship? Where was I? What was this strange land reached through a crater?

"All these thoughts rushed through my brain as I peered cautiously down at the giant women who swarmed about the ship. But I had not long to wait for an answer to my first mental question. With a sudden spring, one of the women leaped to the *Chiriqui's* anchor, with a second bound she was on the fore deck, and close at her heels came a score of others. Standing upon the deck with her head fringed by its erect vibrating membrane level with the boat-deck, she gazed about for an instant. Then, catching sight of the form of a sailor sprawled upon the deck, she uttered a shrill, piercing cry, leaped

forward, and, before my unbelieving, horror-stricken eyes, tore the still living, palpitating body to pieces and ravenously devoured it.

"Unable to stir through the very repulsiveness of the scene, realizing that my turn might be next, I gazed fascinated. But the giant cannibal female was not to feast in peace. As her companions reached the deck, they rushed upon her and fought viciously for a portion of the reeking flesh. The struggle of these awful giants, as smeared with human blood, scratching and clawing, uttering shrill cries of rage, they rolled and fought on the deck, was indescribably terrible and disgusting. But it came to an abrupt end. With a bound, a giantess of giantesses, a powerfully-muscled female, appeared, and like cowed beasts, the others drew aside, licking their chops, the membranes on their heads rising and falling in excitement, like the frills on an iguana lizard, and watching the newly-arrived giantess with furtive eyes. Evidently, she was the leader or chieftainess, and in curt but strangely shrill and, of course, to me, utterly unintelligible words, she gave orders to the others. Instantly, the horde of women began swarming over the ship, searching every nook and corner, and, wherever they discovered the inert bodies of the ship's company, dragged them on deck and piled them in heaps. Shaking with abject terror, I crouched back of the bridge, and racked my brains for thought of some safe spot in which to hide. But before I could make up my mind, one of the terrifying, monstrous females sprang upon the bridge and rushed towards me. With a maniacal scream, I turned and fled. Then, before me, blocking my way, there appeared another of the creatures. And then a most marvelous and surprising thing happened. Instead of falling upon me as I expected her to do, the giantess turned, and with a scream that equaled my own, leaped over the rail and fled to the uttermost extremity of the deck.

"I forgot my terror in my amazement. Why should this giant, cannibal woman fear me? Why should she run from me when, a few moments before, she had been fighting over a meal of an unconscious sailor? And it was evident that the others were equally afraid of me, for at her cry, and my appearance, all had rushed as far from me as possible, and stood regarding me with an odd mixture of wonder and terror on their huge faces. And then it occurred to me that their fear was, perhaps, due to my gas-mask, to the apparatus that transformed me from a human being to a weird looking monster. At any rate, I was evidently safe from molestation for the time being, and thanking my lucky stars that I had on the mask, I descended from the bridge, the giantesses retreating as I advanced. I entered the captain's cabin and locked the door.

"Here I breathed more freely, for even if the women overcame their fear of me and attempted to capture me, the steel doors and walls of the cabin would



It was evident that the others were equally afraid of me, for at her cry, and my appearance, all had rushed as far from me as possible, and stood regarding me with an odd mixture of wonder and terror on their huge faces.

be impregnable defenses. Moreover, upon the wall above the bunk, was a rifle, in a drawer of the dresser was a loaded revolver, and a short search revealed a plentiful supply of cartridges. Yes, if I were attacked, I could give a good account of myself, and I determined, if worst came to the worst, that I would blow out my brains rather than fall a victim to the female cannibal horde.

"Dully, through the thick walls of the cabin, I could hear the sounds of the women on the deck, but I had no desire to witness what was going on, and seated upon the captain's chair, I thought over the events which had transpired during the past few hours and tried to find a reasonable solution to the incredible happenings.

"That I was within the earth seemed certain, though utterly fantastic, but who the giant women were, why they had captured the *Chiriqui* or by what unknown, tremendous power their marvelous airship was operated, were all utterly beyond my comprehension. But I must hurry on and relate the more important matters, for my time is limited and the important thing is to let the world know how the human race may be saved from the terrible fate which has befallen me and all those upon the *Chiriqui*, and upon the destroyer *McCracken*, for that vessel, too, has fallen a victim to these horrible cannibalistic giantesses here within the centre of the earth.

"Hunger and thirst drove me at last from my refuge in the captain's cabin, and armed with the loaded rifle and revolver, I cautiously peered out and stepped upon the deck. Only one woman was in sight, and instantly, at sight of me, she fled away. Not a body of the hundreds of men and women aboard the ship was visible, and feeling relieved that I was for a time safe, I stepped to the ship's rail and peered over. Scores of the women were carrying the inert forms of the unconscious men and women towards the nearby city. Stealthily I hurried below in search of food and drink. Fears assailed me that the women had, in all probability, preceded me and carried off everything edible. But I need not have worried about food. I was yet to learn the horrible truth and the gruesome habits of these red giantesses. The saloon, the corridors, the staterooms, everything, had been searched, and every person upon the vessel removed. In the pantry I found an abundance of food, and quickly satisfied my hunger and thirst. I pondered on my next move. The skipper's cabin seemed my safest refuge. I placed a supply of provisions within it, and locked myself in the little room again. For several days nothing of great importance occurred. I say days, but there are no days in this terrible place. There is no sun, no moon, no stars and no darkness. The whole place is illuminated by a brilliant, greenish light that issues from a distant mountain range, and which seems to be of the same character as that which emanated from the spherical air machine. Fortunately, I had

presence of mind enough to keep my watch going, as well as the captain's chronometer, for otherwise I would have had no knowledge of the passage of time. Once or twice the scarlet women visited the ship, but seemed nervous and wary, and made no effort to approach or molest me, merely gazed about as if searching for something—perhaps for me—and then retiring. Several times, too, I ventured on deck, and peered over the ship's side, but saw none of the giantesses, although with the glasses I could see crowds of the beings about the city in the distance.

“Also, I noticed among them, several individuals who were much smaller than the rest, and who appeared to be men, although I could not be sure. I also discovered, and almost lost my life in the discovery, that the atmosphere of this place is unfit for human beings to breathe, and is thick with sulphurous fumes. Close to the ground these fumes are so dense that a person would succumb in a few moments, but at the height of the *Chiriqui's* decks, nearly seventy feet above the rocky bed on which she rests, the air is breathable, although it causes one to choke and cough after a few minutes. And I am sure that the houses of these giant beings have been built on the summits of the basalt columns in order to avoid the suffocating fumes of the lower levels. Later, too, I learned that the membrane-like frills upon these creatures are a sort of gills, or as I might say, natural gas-masks, which by some means enable the beings to breathe the sulphur-laden air. But even with these, they avoid the lower areas where the fumes are the worst, and only visit them when necessity arises, which accounts for my being left in peace, with none of the horrible women near the ship, for days at a time. I discovered the presence of the sulphur gas on the first day when, attempting to eat, I removed my gas-mask. Suffocating as I found the fumes, I was compelled to endure them, and gradually I became slightly accustomed to them, so that now I have little trouble in breathing during the short time it takes me to eat my meals. At all other times I must wear the apparatus, and I thank God that this is so, for I know now that it is the gasmask which so far has preserved my life.

“On the tenth day after my arrival I noticed a number of the giantesses gathering about the huge, spherical airship which still rested on its cradle near the *Chiriqui*, but which, I have forgotten to state, ceased to emit its green or red lights after it had landed. Lying there it resembled nothing so much as a gigantic can-buoy or a floating mine, if one can imagine a buoy two hundred yards in diameter.

“On the day I mentioned, all interests seemed to be centered on the thing, and cautiously peering from the shelter of the deck-house, I watched the proceedings. Presently several of the women entered the sphere through an

opening in its middle blind; the aperture closed behind them, and immediately there was a low, humming sound as of machinery. As the sounds issued from the sphere, the cables to which were attached the smaller spheres (which glowed red when carrying the *Chiriqui* through the air) were drawn in until the two smaller spheres were resting in recesses at the axes of the large sphere, and where they appeared merely as hemi-spherical projections. Then, slowly at first, but with ever increasing speed, the slender rods about the large sphere began to move back and forth, or rather in an oscillating manner, until they were vibrating with such rapidity that they appeared merely rays of light. Slowly, majestically, the immense globe rose from its cradle, and gathering headway, leaped upward to an immense height. Then, tilting at an angle, it passed over the city and headed for an immense pinnacle of rock, which, fully seven miles from where I stood, reminded me of a gigantic chimney or funnel.

“Although it was barely visible to the naked eye, I could see it distinctly through the glasses, and I watched it with the most intense and concentrated interest. For a few moments it remained, poised a hundred feet or so above the pinnacle. Then, from the towering, tapering rock, a terrific jet of steam roared forth, and striking the great spherical machine above it, hurled it upward and beyond my vision. Give close heed to these words, whoever may, by God’s grace, be listening to what I say, for upon them may hinge the fate of the human race. Only by this means, by being shot upward by this titanic jet of steam, can the airship leave this subterranean land and emerge through the crater by which it entered bearing the *Chiriqui*. Within this place it can sail at will; once above the crater opening it can travel anywhere, although it cannot land; but by some unknown force or magnetic attraction or freak of gravitation the machine cannot ascend through the crater, although, when over it, it will drop like a plummet through the opening. And herein—for the sake of humanity, listen to this and remember my words—lies a means of destroying the machine, for by surrounding the crater with powerful guns the sphere can be shelled as it emerges and utterly destroyed. To attempt to do so as it returns to the crater would be suicidal, for once in the outer air, it emanates vast quantities of most poisonous gas, and all living things within a radius of several miles would be struck down unconscious, as were my companions on the *Chiriqui*. Even if gas-masks were worn, it would be most difficult to destroy the machine as it descended, for it travels with incredible speed in its descent and, moreover, the terrible creatures who man the thing would see that enemies lurked near and would find some means of destroying them, or by the mysterious magnet force they control, would draw even the heaviest cannon to the machine as an

ordinary magnet draws needles or iron filings. So, if the thing is to be destroyed, it must be done as the machine emerges from the crater. Would to God that I could tell where the crater is, but beyond feeling sure it is at the summit of an Andean peak, I have no means of locating it.

“But I was telling of what occurred on that tenth day when the spherical airship was projected from my sight by the blast of steam. As the machine vanished, the women who had watched its departure, returned to their city, and I swept the landscape with my glasses, wondering at the bleak, terrible scenery and bizarre colors.

“As I focused the binoculars upon a level plateau, perhaps a mile from where the *Chiriqui* rested, I gasped in surprise. Clearly defined, lay the remnants of what had once been a steamship! Had I given the matter thought, I might have known that the *Chiriqui* was not the first vessel to have fallen a victim to these awful beings; but the sight of another ship’s skeleton came to me as a terrific shock. As nearly as I could judge, the vessel had been dismantled, for only the great steel frame remained, with the mighty boilers and other portions of the ship scattered about, and gruesomely like some mammoth creature lying disemboweled upon the earth.

“I was consumed with a mad desire to visit that pathetic wreck, but I knew not to what dangers I would be exposed, once I left the security of my ship. Not a being was in sight, however, and carefully I studied the land, visually measuring the relative distances between myself and the wreck, and between the city and the route I must traverse. Having already observed that the giantesses moved slowly and cumbrously on foot, I at last decided that even if they attempted to intercept me, I could regain the *Chiriqui* before I was overtaken, so I threw caution to the winds and prepared to undertake my hazardous journey. Slinging the loaded rifle on my back, with the revolver at my belt, and still further arming myself with a keen-edged fire-axe, I hunted up the pilot’s ladder, lowered it over the lowest side of the ship, —which was also the side farthest from the city, —and clambering down the *Chiriqui*’s lofty sides, leaped down upon the ground. To my amazement, I landed in a dense jungle of dry, tough vegetation which rose to my shoulders. From the deck, looking directly downwards, I had thought this dull-green growth a short, wiry grass, and, of course, in its relative proportion to the gigantic women, it was no higher than ordinary grass to a normal human being. It was a wonderful example of the theory of relativity, but my mind was not interested in scientific matters at the time, and I merely gave thanks that the miniature jungle, —which I saw was composed of giant lichens—would afford me cover through which I might sneak in safety, and with little chance of detection.

“Without much difficulty I made my way to the other vessel, and found her even more dissected than I had supposed. Why the denizens of the place had torn her to bits I did not then know, but certain portions of her machinery and fittings had been left intact, and, as I examined these, I made another and most astounding discovery. Deeply engraved upon a brass plate was the ship’s name ‘*U.S.S. Cyclops.*’ For a space I stood staring, scarcely able to believe my eyes. Here then was the solution to that mystery of the sea, the disappearance of the collier, as laden with manganese, she vanished without word or trace when off the Barbados during the World War. No doubt, I thought, many a mystery of the sea had been caused by the damnable work of these beings with their infernal machine. But why, for what reason, did they capture ships? Why did they carry off the unconscious persons upon the vessels? And why did they tear the vessels apart? It was all a mystery which, in all its horrible, gruesome, ghoulish details I was soon to solve.

“There was nothing more to be learned from the remains of the *Cyclops*, and in safety I returned to the *Chiriqui* to find, to my surprise and terror, that a gang of the monstrous females had boarded the ship in my absence and were stripping her of everything. But as they caught sight of me, all threw down whatever they had and fled precipitately, leaving me once more in undisputed possession of the ship. I was relieved at this, for it was obvious that I had no need to fear the creatures. By now, too, I had formulated a theory to account for this strange dread of a being who was a puny, miserable thing compared to them. Unquestionably my gas-mask rendered me a most grotesque and unknown creature in their eyes. My remaining alive and active while all others upon the ship had succumbed to the noxious gas had probably caused them to think that I was a supernatural being. The fact that I could go about and breathe the sulphur-laden air would cause them to regard me with even greater wonder and superstition, and, as I found later, the fact that I was never seen to eat, confirmed their belief that I was some mysterious being against whom their gases and their deviltries were of no avail.

“I had not much time to devote to such matters, however. Soon after regaining the *Chiriqui* I heard excited cries from the land, and looking over the ship’s rails, I found an immense crowd had gathered near the empty cradle of the airship, and that all were gazing upward. Following their example, I stared into the greenish void and instantly understood. Descending rapidly towards the plain, came the great sphere, and, suspended below it, was the hull of another captive ship. And as I focused my glasses upon this, I rubbed my eyes and gaped. The dull gray color, the lines, the raking funnels, the barbettes and gun muzzles left no room for doubt. Incredible as it seemed,

the captive vessel was a warship! What hope then had my fellow men upon earth? What chance was there if these giant creatures could send forth their flaming machine, and by it, capture the fastest, most powerful war-vessels—all within the space of a few hours?

“Rapidly the machine and its burden approached, and presently descended gently dropping the war vessel close to the *Chiriqui*. My worst fears were confirmed. The vessel was an American destroyer, the *McCracken*, and I knew that scores of my countrymen must lie unconscious upon her, and in a few moments would be carried off to some unknown horrible fate. What that fate was I had already surmised. That first demonstration of the ferocious cannibalism of the giantesses upon the *Chiriqui*’s deck had been enough to make my blood run cold.

“But I had not yet guessed even a fraction of the true horror of it. Scarcely had the *McCracken* been dropped upon the earth, when the women swarmed upon her, and once more I saw the creatures gathering the inert forms of men and carrying them to the city. And rapidly, too, they commenced dismantling and tearing the destroyer into bits. How they had accomplished this with the *Cyclops* had puzzled me, but now I witnessed the process close at hand. From the vicinity of the waterfall, lines or pipes were led to the vessel’s side; presently there was the roaring sound of steam; dense clouds of vapor arose from the cataract; the water ceased to flow, and from the extremities of the lines or tubes twenty-foot jets of blinding flame shot out. As easily as though made of wax, the steel sides, the massive beams, the armored barbettes of the warship melted and were cut by these jets, and as the pieces fell apart, the spherical airship took a position above the vessel, and by its magnetic power, lifted tons of the fragments, then sailing off, deposited them in some spot beyond the city. It was then, as I saw the ship rapidly dissolving before my eyes, that the inspiration came to me which may make it possible for me to communicate with the outside world and may, if God wills, serve to warn my fellow men of the fate which will overtake them if these terrible creatures are allowed to follow out their plans. As the jets of flame cut through the *McCracken*’s superstructure, and the radio antennae fell in a tangled mass across the deck, I forgot all else and rushed to the wireless room of the *Chiriqui*. Here was my chance. If the ship’s radio transmitter was still in working order; if the auxiliary battery was still charged, I might send out messages which, small as the chances were, might reach the ears of some of the countless thousands of persons who listened each night at their receiving sets. I trembled with fear that I would find the transmitter injured or dismantled. I shook with dread that the battery might be dead. I felt faint with apprehension that the message, if sent, might never penetrate

the sulphur-laden atmosphere or might never reach the outer world. And I realized, with a sickening sinking of my heart, that even if heard my communication might be regarded as a hoax, and no attention would be given it. But I would do my best. The radio set had not been molested. Everything was in working order, and I set myself the task of transmitting my story each night at the same hour, repeating it over and over again, until the storage batteries are exhausted, for to get up steam and start the dynamos is beyond my powers. Had I knowledge of Morse I would send my story by that code, but I have not, and so—I must cease. For the love of your race and of your dear ones listen, I beseech you, until I can resume.”

Here the message broke off abruptly, and Frank and I sat staring at each other, fearing to speak lest we might interrupt or miss the words which might come, and listening with straining ears at the head-sets. For an hour we sat there and then, once more the voice spoke.

“The doom that I feared is approaching. I have been here for three months and this will, I know, be my final message. Oh, that I could only be sure that someone has heard my words, that my fate has not been in vain but has served to warn my fellow beings. But I must hurry on. I have learned everything of importance. I have watched, studied and have even learned to understand much of the language of these beings. I found that there were men. They are puny beings compared to the women, though ten-foot giants compared to normal men, and they are cowed, abject, mere slaves of the females. Only enough male children are permitted to survive to propagate the race. All others are killed.

“As they reach manhood only those males of super-intelligence, strength and virility are permitted to live. The others are destroyed and—yes, horrible as it sounds, their bodies, like those of the murdered infants and of the aged, sick or infirm, are devoured. And as fast as the males attain middle age their lives are forfeited. Long ago these beings subsisted upon the few wild creatures which roamed their land; but long ago all these were exhausted and human flesh became the only meat. There is no vegetable food, and for a time the sacrificed surplus males, and the aged, provided food for the race. But gradually the male births decreased, female children preponderated, and with the increased population resulting, the males were too few to nourish the others. Then, through what damnable accident or design I do not know, the creatures went forth in their airship and discovered the teeming millions of human beings on earth.

“But the bulk of humanity was and still is safe from them, at least until new means of attacking mankind are devised, for the globular airship cannot approach the land. The very power it uses to lift the greatest steamships

and carry them off, draws the machine to the earth and holds it fast. But above water, which acts as an insulator apparently, the apparatus can operate at will. And they have a twofold purpose in capturing ships. All the available metal in this land was exhausted in constructing two of the spherical machines. One of these never returned from its first trip, and only the one remains. To construct more, these giant women plan to use the metal salvaged from captured ships, until a vast fleet of the infernal things is ready to go forth and wipe the seas clean of ships and human beings. And the bodies of the men and women, struck down by the gas, are to serve as food for these demons in human form.

“This is the most horrible, blood-curdling thing of all. Rendered unconscious by the gas, the victims remain in a state of suspended animation indefinitely, exactly as do grubs, spiders and insects when stung by certain species of wasps and placed in their nests to provide food for their young. Stacked in great storage vaults these breathing, living, but paralyzed human beings are kept, and as needed, are taken out.

“Already they have a supply on hand sufficient to last them for over a year. Some of the *Cyclops*’ company are still preserved; there are over three hundred from the *Chiriqui*, hundreds from other ships, and the entire crew of the *McCracken*.

“All these things I learned little by little, and mainly through a friend, for marvelous as it may seem, I have a friend—if friend he can be called, a miserable, trembling, terrified male, who, doomed to death, sought to escape his fate and sought refuge with me, dreading my presence less than his doom, and hoping that such a feared and almost revered being as myself might protect him. For two months he has been my companion, but he cannot eat anything but meat and the supply of meat upon the ship is getting low, and sooner or later he must succumb. And the women, maddened at his escape from their clutches, though not yet daring to approach too closely to me, are getting bolder. Some time, at some unguarded moment, they will find the poor fellow alone and will fall upon him. And in his terror, in an effort to buy his life, he will, I know, reveal to them that I am but an ordinary mortal, a man who eats and drinks and who survived the gas by mechanical and not supernatural means. But I will not be taken alive by these fearful female cannibals. When the time comes, as I know it will, I will blow my brains out, and though they may devour my body they will not rend me alive. No more ships have been brought in here since the *McCracken* was captured. But this I know is due to the fact that all the energies of these creatures are being devoted to building additional air machines. This work goes on in a vast cavern beyond the city where tremendous forces, furnaces with heat

beyond human conception and machines of which we know nothing, are controlled by the internal steam, the radiant energy and the magnetic powers of the earth's core.

"And now, again let me implore any and all who may hear my words to give close attention to what I say, for here again is a means by which humanity may combat and destroy these ghastly, gigantic cannibals. The spherical air-machines are helpless from above. Their magnetic or electrical forces extend only downwards. The gasses they throw out are heavier than air and descend but cannot ascend, and by means of swift planes, huge bombs and machine guns, the things can be easily destroyed. And they cannot travel without throwing off the dazzling green light. Only when motionless are they dark. And so, they will offer easy marks and can be readily detected. So, I beseech you who may hear, that the governments are notified and warned and that a fleet or many fleets of airplanes properly equipped patrol the seas, and at first sight of one of the green meteors rise above it and utterly destroy it without mercy.

"Wait! I hear a terrified scream . . . I am back again at the transmitter. It was the fellow who has been with me. Poor devil! He has met his fate, but after all it was the custom of his people, and, moreover, he would have starved to death in a few days. For that matter I, too, face starvation. The ship's stock is running low; all the food upon the *McCracken* was destroyed in cutting up that vessel, and unless another ship is captured, I will have no food after two weeks more. What a strange thought! How terrible an idea! That the awful fate of hundreds of my fellows would be my salvation! But I will never live to die from hunger. I can hear the terrible screams of my late companion on the deck outside. God! It is the end! The fellow must have told the enraged females. His body has been torn to shreds. With bloody hands and reeking lips, they are rushing towards the upper deck where I sit. They are here! This is my last word! God grant that I have been heard! I am about to—"

Crashing in our ears came the report of a pistol.

THE END.

ENCHANTRESS OF LEMURIA

By Stanton A. Coblentz



CHAPTER I

THE WOMAN UNDERGROUND

"I'M at the club, Will. Why not come down and we'll have one of our old-time tete-a-tetes over the dinner table?" I listened expectantly for Will Claybrook's voice in the receiver.

As it came to me now across the wire, it struck me as strained, remote, and singularly lacking in interest, almost like a voice from some other world.

"No—no—can't. All tied up—can't get away—not one minute."

"Well then, maybe tomorrow?"

"No, not tomorrow. Not any evening. I'm too busy, Tom. Better come up here if you want to see me . . . Good-bye!"

Had it been any one but Will, I would have muttered, "To hell with him!" and promptly turned to something else. But I was used to Will and his ways; he and I had been chums since we were freshmen at college; and knowing that he was doubtless deep in some new experiment, I determined to step into his laboratory that evening. I had been away on a long business trip and I was anxious to see him; he was my best friend.

He had already been working at inventions for more than ten years. Ever since his graduation from college, when he had been employed as an engineer by the Rowney Bridge and Construction Works, he had been spending his spare hours in his small but well-equipped home laboratory. "Rod-and-Shuttle Claybrook" was the nickname some of the boys gave him; although to his intimates, of course, he was always simply "Will."

I can still see him as he was in those days, a gangling six-footer, with a rail-thin body, a slight stoop, clothes perpetually shabby, and a long, lean, bespectacled face with a gigantic domed forehead and clear blue eyes with as innocent and yet intense and alive a light as I have ever seen in any human countenance.

But I doubt if there were many who could understand that rarely intelligent and eager soul, whose one passion, whose one devotion was science, to such an extent that he lived like a hermit and hardly seemed aware of the existence of the so-called "gentler sex."

It was my own confident belief that Will would end in a position high among the world's great inventive geniuses. It might take him years; but from what I had seen of his Multi-Tone Pocket Radio Receiver, his Manganes-Nickel Airplane Protective Antennae and his Super-Magnetic Sound Detector, I expected him to take a place side by side with Marconi and Edison.

Most of all, I had been impressed by the chemical which he named Blue Nitrolene. I know little of the formula of this accursed substance, except that it was a compound of nitrogen, carbon, sulphur and phosphorus; but I have seen how it acted as an *atomic catalyzer*. That is to say, the heavier and more complex atoms broke down in its presence, to the accompaniment of an enormous release of energy; gold could literally be converted into iron, silver into lead, etc.

Never will I forget the time when, under careful control, Will injected a milligram of the sea-blue compound into a glass container filled with fifty pounds of steel. Instantly there was such a seething and bubbling that the metal disappeared in a mist, the glass melted, a furnace heat encompassed us, and, had it not been for the immediate application of a powerful stream of water, the laboratory and its occupants might have been written of in the past tense.

"Good heavens, Will," I exclaimed, when I had begun to recover from the shock, "what's the object? Suicide and murder?"

"Guess I measured the damned stuff wrong. Might have put in a tenth of a milligram too much," he apologized, as he dolefully brushed back his thinning sandy hair.

"What you intend to do with it? Commit wholesale massacre?" I gibed.

"Well, in a sense," he returned, gravely. "Can't imagine anything better for wiping out an enemy in case of foreign invasion. But the Government, curse it, can't see things that way. Gave a demonstration to an agent night before last, and he swore he wouldn't handle it with a seven-mile pole. Seven-mile pole! That's the very phrase he used!"

"Can't blame him! That's how I feel, too!" I grunted.

Nevertheless, Will went on, in his solemn, heavy voice, to declaim against the imbecility of government agents.

All this was in my mind as I made my way expectantly toward Will's house at the outskirts of town. But though I was anticipating some new invention, how little did I foresee what awaited me!

Will's eyes, as he mumbled a greeting, had an animation even beyond their usual enthusiastic glow. His whole face seemed illuminated; he moved with the oddly excited and yet preoccupied manner of a man who follows some inner light.

He scarcely took time to ask, perfunctorily,

"Well, how's things, Tom?" But, leading me in among the flasks and wires of the laboratory, he broke out, irrepressibly,

"Come this way, this way, you're just in time. Got something to show you. Just step over this way, and you'll see *her*"

"Her?" I echoed, wondering if my friend could be suffering from a brain storm.

A look of pleasure, almost of delight radiated from that thin, intellectual face.

"Yes, her," he repeated; and I noticed that his features had indefinitely softened. "The sweetest, most charming, most beautiful—but come, you'll see for yourself!"

His tones, his manner, it came to me with a shock, were no longer those of the woman-shunning hermit. They were those of a man in love!

But had my friend gone crazy? For surely no maiden, however ethereal, could be hiding among the wheels, rods and tubes of the laboratory! There was scarcely space for a cat to conceal itself!

"Quick, or she'll go away!" he directed, impatiently; and pointed to the eye-piece of an instrument that reminded me of a hand telescope, except that it was turned earthward, and was connected with a long series of prisms and lenses and with an intricacy of wires that made a low continuous whirring.

He turned a dial, and a blue light widened at the base of the machine. There was a crackling as of remote muffled thunder; a green spark shot up and died. But I still wondered what vagary had possession of Will as I took my place at the eyepiece and peeped through with a squint.

"Now, now, quick, tell me! What do you see?" he popped out, impatiently.

"Not a darned thing!" I returned. For all that I could make out was a confusion of dancing lights and shadows.

"Wait, I've got to adjust it to your eyes!" he went on, giving the dial another twist.

Again, the lights and shadows danced; then gradually they began to take definite shape, and I had the sensation of one who peers through opera glasses at a remote stage.

"Well now, now do you see?" Will demanded. "Do you see her?"

I did not see any her. But what I did observe was enough to make me wonder if we were not both out of our heads. Surely, it was all an illusion, an hallucination! Those incredible sights were not real, could not be real!

It seemed to me that I was looking down into an enormous cavern in the earth; a cavern as wide as whole counties and as deep as a mountain gorge. Just below me (or so it appeared, as I stared through the glass) a city spread, of such a construction that at first, I did not know if it were a city at all. In fact, I might have mistaken it for some outlandish vegetable growth, had it not been for the weird silvery light that suffused it, in places tinged with amber, lavender or pale green.

The palaces (for so I thought of them) were all gracefully curved, some of them shaped like gigantic bubbles, some of them like immense mushrooms that glowed iridescently with an inner illumination. Here was a group of little blue-tinted dwellings that looked oddly like a cluster of hydrangeas; yonder was a domed temple that may have been of glass, and that changed gradually in color through pink and rose to violet and indigo. On curving walks that branched among the fairy-like buildings, little shapes that I took to be men and women were moving in a leisurely fashion; but they appeared too remote to be observed in detail.

"Well, now do you see *her*?" Will's excited voice dinned in my ears.

I was too fascinated by what I did see to pay any heed to those words.

"Oh, Lord, just look what I've done!" exclaimed my friend, slapping his thigh in intense irritation. "Switched the dial back to 'Distance.' Of course, you don't see her. What an idiot I am! Well here, now you'll get a close-up!"

A sharp whirring rang out in my ears; the bubble towers vanished in a surge of reeling shadows; then, after a second or two, a new scene formed itself before my eyes.

"At last! At last do you see?" Will fairly shouted.

I was looking down at an alabaster court between two of the great mushroom-shaped buildings. At one side, the rainbowed spray of a fountain was visible. I could see that the walls of one of the palaces was covered with strangely beautiful painted inscriptions; while, upon glowing pedestals, I noticed the busts of venerable-looking bearded men, and women with faces like the Venus de Milo.

"Now, you numbskull! Tell me, do you see her?" insisted Will, with growing impatience.

"All I see is the busts," I reported, wondering if my poor friend could be so far lost as to have fallen in love with a stone image.

"Then she's gone away!" he groaned. "She's gone away! Didn't I tell you to hurry?"

Even as he spoke, however, my attention was caught by a figure that glided slowly into sight. And instantly I understood what it was that had enchanted Will. I, too, though I had believed my romantic days well behind me, felt my pulses fluttering just a little at sight of that queenly being.

But "queenly," I am afraid, is too pale a word to describe this sorceress who, with movements like music, passed briefly across my view. Not that there was anything about her of conscious witchery; she was young, not more than seventeen or eighteen; and her face, with the big lustrous violet eyes shining from beneath a moderate forehead crowned with auburn hair, beamed with the smiling innocence of one who is wholly untainted and unspoiled.

I fear, however, that it is beyond my powers to convey the impression of beauty she gave, more like a Grecian goddess than a mere mortal as she ambled on her way, clad in a robe of some shimmering cobweb substance that reached barely to her knees and left the shapely calves exposed above her sandaled feet. Her complexion was pale—almost of the traditional milky white; and her expression, as she burst momentarily into laughter (almost as if to ridicule me as I watched her!), was indescribably clear and bright.

I am ashamed to report it, but I was left babbling and incoherent as she drifted from view, followed by a peacock with magnificent outspread fan.

"Ah! So you've seen her!" exclaimed Will, not needing the confirmation of my words. "Isn't she just about like heaven itself?"

I nodded; while Will greedily took my place at the eyepiece. But after a glance, he sighed,

"She's gone, curse the luck! She's gone! Don't know when I'll get a glimpse of her again!"

But for a long while he continued to stare steadily through the instrument.

Meanwhile I was gradually re-gaining my sanity, and a thousand and one questions were popping into my mind. What was the great cavern I had just seen? Where was it? What were the mushroom palaces? Who was the maiden on the rainbow-fountained court? How had Will been able to see them through his instrument? Were they things that existed on some other planet? Were they mere reproductions, through a time machine, of segments of a remote past?

These thoughts, and others as fantastic, flashed through my mind in rapid succession; but it was long before I could wean my friend away from the eyepiece and pry any semblance of an answer from his lips.

"Why, it's all very simple," he explained, as he absently fingered a dial marked *Remote Control*. "It's all done through the Pellucid Depth Ray."

"What under heaven's that?"

"Guess you wouldn't understand if I told you, Tom. It's a sort of subterranean television machine."

"Subterranean television machine?"

"Yes. In other words, a machine to see through the earth. I thought you would have guessed. What do you think you were looking at, anyway, except a scene ten or fifteen miles below your feet?"

"Ten or fifteen miles below my feet? My God, Will!"

"Oh, the Pellucid Depth Ray can see much further than that," he declared, with an expression that seemed to say, "This is mere child's play."

"But how? How is it possible? No ray known—not even the cosmic rays—have anything like that penetrating power."

"Well, the word ray is perhaps a misnomer. Let's go back to the principle of television. Certain scenes are converted by electrical means into mere vibrations in the ether, from which they are converted back again into scenes upon a screen. In the same way, the events occurring beneath the earth's surface give rise to faint—very faint—electrical pulsations, which I am able to pick up by means of my machine so as to reproduce the original scenes. Of course, I have to amplify the impressions more than a million times. But is there anything more surprising about that than about other accomplishments in television and radio?"

"No, no, I suppose not," I admitted, reluctantly. "But how did you find this cavern in the earth? And what in thunder do you think it is, anyhow?"

"You know as well as I what it is," he returned, with a shrug. "Guess it'll take a whale of a lot of investigating to clear up that mystery. But how did I find it? Simplest thing on earth! Merely turned the Pellucid Depth Ray straight underground, looking for whatever I could find, until I came across this wonderful cavern. However, it was days before I saw any sign of her."

"Forget about her!" I counselled, not liking the dreamy look that had come into his eyes. "It won't do you any good, Will, brooding over a girl you'll never see except at long distance—"

"Oh, won't I!"

He shot toward me with electrical suddenness; and flung me a glance that was challenging, almost defiant.

"What's to prevent me from going right down into the cavern—yes, and meeting her face to face? What's to prevent me, I'd like to know?"

"Holy Jerusalem, Will! You don't mean to say—"

"I mean to say I've got it all planned! What do you think I've been so damned busy about, anyway? It's taken me days of slow labor, but the Depth Ray has located a small tunnel that leads up from the main gallery, connecting with one of the natural caverns in the Whitley Range a few miles west of here."

"And you think—think you can find that cavern?"

"What's to prevent me, with the Depth Ray for guide?"

"But you wouldn't be damned fool enough—"

Sharply, almost angrily, his interruption flashed out.

"See here, Tom, better keep your comments to yourself! When I've made up my mind on any matter, then it's made up—and I was never more set on anything in my life than on this expedition down to the Great Cavern, as I call it. Just look! I've got everything arranged!"

He flung open a small closet door, revealing a neatly packed knapsack.

"Everything I need is there!" he rumbled on. "Concentrated food; water;

flashlights; a camera; photographs of our country, and so on. Day after tomorrow I set out!"

I stared at him, stunned.

"Day after tomorrow? Mean to say you're going to do this alone—and on foot? Why, man, you'll never come out alive!"

"It's worth any risk," he declared, with a smile. "Yes, well worth any risk! Just think what an opportunity—to explore another world!"

"But good heavens, Will, why all the rush? Why don't you wait a while? Why not organize a party—"

The light in his eyes was far-off, exalted, almost ecstatic. "No, no, I can't wait! Can't! Not one hour more than need be! I must get down there to see—to see her!"

As I saw the flushed, nervous manner in which he began ranging about the room, I knew that arguments would be futile. That lovely creature in the Great Cavern had caught him beyond my power to save! And when, a little later, I bade him farewell after vainly trying to extract some further details of his plans, it was with the feeling of one who leaves a soon-to-be-executed friend.

To this day, I doubt if he was fully aware of me as I sorrowfully shook his hand and slipped from the room.

"See, there she is again!" he cried, as he took his place at the eyepiece of his infernal machine. "There she is again! Good Lord! Isn't she the most glorious thing God ever put on this earth!"

CHAPTER II

A CHALLENGE TO DEATH

TWO or three days after my talk with Will, a sensation was caused by the discovery of his Brighton coupé, parked in a barren gorge of the Whitley range, not far from the entrance of one of the many limestone caverns that thread the region.

As no man in his right mind would deliberately abandon his car in that desolate district, it was assumed that he had met with mishap or foul play; and searchers, scouring the hills or exploring the caves with lanterns, expected nothing better than to come across his mutilated remains.

However, no trace of him was found, except for a penknife which had evidently been dropped by chance deep in one of the caves, and which some of the party believed may have belonged to Will. But this point was never definitely decided; and after a time, for want of clues, the hunt was abandoned,

and “the mysterious disappearance of William Claybrook” was accepted as a thing beyond human explanation, and was gradually forgotten.

Doubtless many of you will remember the newspaper story of the rescue of William Claybrook and an unknown woman, who were on the verge of death by starvation and exposure, many months later. But little, really, is known of the story behind that news item, or of the mystery of the whereabouts of Claybrook during the intervening months. It was assumed that he had lived, somehow, in a mountain retreat, but was finally forced to seek civilization again when his food supply was destroyed in a landslide.

But now, after the passage of more than two years, I have persuaded Will to let me publish the true story of his extraordinary adventures in the subterranean world fifteen miles below the surface, for he did reach it.

I shall pass very briefly over the beginnings of his experience, since the sequel was so much more striking. After leaving his car, he plodded for hours through the caverns of the Whitley Range, weighed down with the fifty pounds of his pack, and guided by a map which he had made by means of the Pellucid Depth Ray.

From tunnel to remote connecting tunnel he forced his way by the beams of a flashlight; through passages so narrow that he had to crawl on hands and knees; over perilous watercourses; down sheer rock ledges, and into sections where no man had ever penetrated before. A dozen times he skirted the edge of death; fifty times he had to halt from exhaustion. Sometimes he lay on a limestone shelf for an hour or two of badly needed sleep; sometimes he fancied himself to be lost amid the labyrinths; but always he pressed on and on, and down and down—

It may have been partly through good luck that he at last reached his goal; though he maintained that it was all a matter of careful planning. At any rate, at a depth of more than five miles he faced his supreme difficulty. The heat at this point was torrid, the heavy air almost unendurable. He had stripped to the waist, and yet sweated continually; but still he forced his way on—until stopped by a solid barricade of rock. This he had seen through the Ray machine; and this he had prepared for by means of a stick of dynamite.

Personally, I would never have had the nerve to insert a charge of high explosive in that subterranean recess; but Will was prepared for just this act; he lit a time-fuse; retreated to what he thought a safe distance, and waited with more confidence than most men in his situation would have shown.

In that narrow corridor, the force of the explosion must have been terrific; Will admits that he was momentarily stunned. But the next instant, recovering himself, he felt a cool breeze howling over him, and knew that he had blasted open the entrance to the Great Cavern.

In the Cavern itself, all was coal-black—which did not surprise Will, for he knew that the lights went on and off periodically, as if by a clockwork arrangement—sixteen hours on, and eight off, with the regularity of the Old Faithful geyser.

“Good! Luck’s with me!” he muttered to himself. Then cautiously he crept forward, feeling for his foothold inch by inch, for it would be unsafe to betray himself by a flashlight. After a perilous hour, he had groped his way out of the narrow corridor, and had the sense of great spaces opening about him, although everything was still as black as a blind man’s world.

From his observations with the Depth Ray, he knew that he had come out on the side of a hill, which he had termed the Golden Ridge, because of its peculiar tint. It was now his purpose to feel his way down the hillside, toward a cluster of bubble palaces; then, upon the return of the light, he thought, he could safely introduce himself to the natives.

But he had been a little too sanguine. No sooner had he entered the Cavern than a confusion of cries met his ears—cries of consternation and terror which arose in a great disturbing chorus, some near, some far, punctuated by sharper screams and calls, as if the entire populace had been aroused.

This, however, Will was prepared for in a measure, since he could hardly have expected the noise of the explosion to go unnoticed. Yet he had not anticipated such a general alarm.

Beneath the overtone of agitated cries, there were rustlings and flutterings in the night; sounds as of feet pattering, of robes swishing, of excited movements to and fro.

Warily the intruder began to creep down the hill, feeling his way inch by inch; but he was conscious of presences all around him, of stealthy forms moving close at hand through the darkness. He had to use all his power of will not to betray himself by turning on a flashlight; but at the same time he felt, he almost knew that his movements were no secret to the invisible watchers.

“Gulm titsum gulm!”

These may not have been the exact syllables of the challenge that rang forth, abruptly, almost within arm’s length; but these were the words, as nearly as Will could afterward recall them.

Terrified, he stopped short.

“Gulm titsum gulm!”

Twice the phrase was repeated. Then a greenish phosphorescent light, larger than a man’s head, broke out just in front of him, not more than five feet away, with a dull uncanny illumination by which he could vaguely see a crowd of staring faces.

Wonder, dread and dismay were registered in those countenances. He could see how some of the spectators started back in repugnance, with cries as of men who have unexpectedly encountered a dangerous beast in the dark.

Sliding down to his hands and knees, Will tried to slip off into the shadows. But another phosphorescent greenish light burst out, and he saw that he was surrounded.

If ever he regretted his rasp adventure, it was at that moment. His heart hammered; his breath came fast; he thought with hitter longings of the tunnel he had just left.

A moment passed, while he listened to the voices whispering; whispering rapidly and sibilantly, in that same unknown tongue. Then, out of the green-streaked shadows, a tall figure approached, carrying a machine that resembled a large insect-sprayer. He pressed a little bulb; a long tube, like a rifle-barrel, shot out toward the startled observer; and from this tube a rain of fine vapor was showered over Will.

The victim coughed; gasped; had a sensation as of strangling, with an odor as of garlic in his nostrils; then felt a numbness coming over all his limbs, and sank to earth, possessing no more power over his muscles than if they had belonged to some other person.

"Bult zimplol thim!" he heard a voice, rapid and excited. And two figures bent down and slipped heavy straps about him, until he was scarcely able to squirm; after which he felt himself being lifted, and borne away on several pairs of stout shoulders.

Not until long afterward did he learn how he had been so swiftly found and captured. He did not as yet realize that his presence and exact location had been revealed by a machine known as the "Man Detector," which recorded the faint electrical vibrations given off by the human brain, and so made it possible to discover the exact whereabouts of any man at a distance of several hundred yards.

Likewise, he did not know that the vapor-showering machine shot out a gas which, while leaving no permanent effects, temporarily paralyzed the motor nerve centers, but left the brain otherwise unimpaired. All that Will really understood, in that terrifying moment of his capture, was that he was helpless in the hands of beings endowed with unheard-of scientific powers.

For possibly two or three miles they carried him, through thoroughfares absolutely blank except for the circles of greenish phosphorescent light. He had no idea where he was being borne; he only knew that he was accompanied by a crowd, for he could hear the padding footsteps, the low voices whispering in that queer-sounding tongue. Where were they taking him? To what new terrors? To what inescapable doom?

While these thoughts were sweeping through his mind, suddenly he was dazed by a flare of lights. The pitchy gloom of midnight had given place all at once to the silvery glow of day. Dazzled, Will did not realize for a moment that this was but the normal end of one of the eight-hour periods of darkness, the beginning of one of the sixteen-hour intervals of light. In bewilderment and wonder, he was staring up at a ceiling a thousand feet above, on which multitudes of bulbs flamed in pleasing geometrical patterns. He noticed again, as he had done through the Depth Ray, that the ceiling was supported by concrete columns which, tapering upward like inverted funnels, were each many yards thick at the base and were separated by intervals of close to a quarter of a mile. But, most of all, he was amazed at the palaces.

Mushroom-shaped and bubble-like, as he had seen them from above, and glowing iridescently with a light from within, they were like the temples of a dream world; and were far more beautiful now, in their pastel colorings of cream and lavender and amber and sky-blue, than when seen by means of the Depth Ray.

In the courts, between the buildings, flowers such as Will had never seen before were blooming: orange-yellow roses as big as dahlias, and blue-and-gold dahlias as large as a man's lap, and rainbow-hued blossoms of types that Will had never seen before; while lemon-winged birds flitted among the trees and sang with a melody surpassing the nightingale.

Now that he had a chance to see his captors, his fears began to leave him. These men, with their clear blue eyes, broad high brows and sensitive open countenances, did not look as if they would inflict deliberate cruelty; although their lips were set, and there was a stern and determined look on their faces as they jogged along at an unhurried pace.

After a time, they paused before the largest building of all—an edifice of many-domed crystal, with cupolas and spires that changed constantly in color, in a manner to outrival the chameleon. Will had a glimpse of something that looked like an elevated railway, which ran behind the building; multitudes of individuals were gliding back and forth upon a lace-work bridge—a bridge composed of two great movable platforms, one running in each direction—the local means of solving the transportation problem!

He also had glimpses of other queer contrivances, including a deep chute from which men and women were hurled into air like corks from a popgun, to go drifting gracefully to the ground beneath shimmering parachutes. He was fascinated by the tubes which rose from the earth, and from which drafts of air were constantly pouring, as from the ventilators in the cabins of modern steamers; and, for the first time, it occurred to him that

the temperature was pleasantly cool, although according to all calculations, considering the depth, it should have been insufferably hot.

But Will had little time for such thoughts and observations. He was carried through a small oblong doorway into the crystalline edifice; down a long-arched corridor that glowed with translucent rose and gold, and into a great vaulted chamber where dozens of men in long flowing robes were squatted cross-legged on the floor.

On entering, each of Will's captors reached down and touched the floor three times with his left hand, while uttering what sounded like a mumbled prayer. Then, arising, they approached a platform in the center, where an impressive-looking individual was sitting, also cross-legged, upon a platform of purple velvet.

This dignitary, white-bearded and venerable-looking, and clad in a shining white mantle, looked down at the newcomers with a grave and yet benignant expression.

"Bludel? Bludel? Bludel?" he said, in a manner of gentle inquiry; and fixed Will with a gaze of patriarchal authority.

Will's attendants replied, with obvious meekness and respect; and pointed to him continually during the conversation, which lasted ten or fifteen minutes. One word kept recurring as they addressed the white-mantled one:

"Timur, Timur, Timur!"

Will could not but recognize this as the name or title of the magistrate—for such he took the figure on the platform to be. And he had the uneasy sense that his fate was being decided.

But the decision, when it was made, remained a mystery to Will. Timur leaned down, pointed to the captive and made a series of slow and sonorous pronouncements, while his followers listened deferentially. Then the men bent down once more, and each touched the floor three times with his left hand; after which they started away, bearing their captive, still paralyzed, down a long, dimly illuminated gallery that slanted into the depths of the earth.

CHAPTER III

THE PEOPLE OF THE ABYSS

AFTER being carried through endless labyrinths, Will was locked in a subterranean room, where he was to remain a prisoner for many weeks, while being regularly fed and cared for. Each day a long-robed dignitary arrived, who spent hours with him, teaching him the native lan-

guage and customs; and thus, after a time he was able to solve the mystery of the Great Cavern, and to learn who its people were and how they had come to dwell underground.

The country was called Le-Mur; and its people were descendants of the ancient Lemurians, who had inhabited the Pacific continent that sank beneath the ocean thousands of years before. At the time of the disaster, when tidal waves and volcanic eruptions of unparalleled violence were laying the country waste, a ruling caste of thousands of men and women had been able to retreat underground to cavern shelters which they had prepared against precisely this emergency—scientists having foretold the cataclysm many years in advance.

Equipped with all manner of mechanical devices, they had been able to survive even when the disturbance had sealed the galleries by which they had hoped to return to the upper world. They manufactured their food synthetically, creating carbohydrates, proteins and edible fats by the transformation of the mineral oil of the earth. They had a system of interatomic lighting, which kept their homes illuminated with but slight expenditure of energy. They maintained a fanning and ventilating system which worked perfectly, aided by the constant release of oxygen from various metallic oxides. They cooled their galleries by electrical refrigeration, employing the earth's internal heat to generate the electricity. And they had gradually, in the course of many centuries, expanded their subterranean domains, which now reached for hundreds of miles, with interminable branching by-ways and corridors and occasional enormous caverns like the one which Will had discovered.

As generation after generation led its life underground, a prejudice had begun to arise against the sunlit world above—even a fear, a superstition against the People of the Upper Air, as the surface dwellers were known. In the early days, some of the Lemurians had indeed escaped from their cavern life, and had entered the "Upper Air," never to be heard of again.

But as time went by, such escapes had been severely frowned upon, and at length had been forbidden, under threat of death; the tunnels connecting with the earth's surface, which had been built long before, were carefully sealed, and the very secret of their location was locked in archives known only to the Committee of Elders. "Le-Mur for the Le-Murs!" was the motto. To make contact with the peoples of the Upper Air, reasoned the statesmen of the Caverns, would be to end Le-Mur's blessed isolation, and to bring down no one knew what manner of "foreign plagues and devils."

For many centuries, according to the accounts Will heard, the life of Le-Mur had really been blessed. In their bubble palaces, the people had led an

existence that was wise, sane and beautiful; protected from overcrowding by scientific regulation of population; and shielded from want by an equitable system of distribution, which gave to everyone all that he required of every commodity, and allowed to all alike ample time for recreation and for pursuit of art, learning, and personal hobbies.

But of recent years, decay had set in. The life of Le-Mur, although still as smooth as ever on the surface, had been penetrated by a deep, gnawing disease, which was fast chewing away at the foundations. This was not, indeed, told to Will by his instructor; but this he was to learn, in a striking fashion, after he had been in Le-Mur for three months and had, through studious application, acquired a fair knowledge of the language.

He had often wondered for what end he was being trained; and why such evident care had been taken to drill him in both writing and speaking Le-Murian. But he assumed that the natives desired to learn from him something of his own country—if a Martian explorer were to arrive in America, would our first thought not be to teach him English? The main question in Will's mind was whether, once his training was completed, he would be kept a prisoner; or whether he would be released, to explore the cavern-world, and perhaps—perhaps! —to meet the fascinating woman he had seen by means of the Depth Ray.

One day, after a long session with his instructor, who pronounced his work "Satisfactory! Very satisfactory!", he received a summons, which sounded through a little speaking tube high up on the wall:

"The Timur desires an audience, the Timur desires an audience with the man of the Upper Air! Let him follow the yellow line, and take the violet Running Platform at the left-hand side of the third corridor to the right!"

No sooner had these words been spoken than, with a loud clattering, Will's prison door burst open. Emerging, he saw a line of yellow light, which he followed down several curving galleries, until he came to a place corresponding, roughly, to a railroad station on earth. Dozens of movable platforms, laden with passengers, were twisting in and out and halting for brief intervals in a sort of general depot.

Finding the violet platform, which was unoccupied, he stepped aboard, and dropped into a little seat. Almost instantly, as if under intelligent guidance, it began to move, and Will was shot up through a sloping tunnel and out upon a sort of causeway in the Great Cavern, from which he looked down upon the mushroom buildings.

It was only a few minutes before he stopped at the palace of many-domed crystal, with the chameleon towers constantly changing in color; and there he was met by an attendant in a shimmering blue robe, who raised both

hands in salute, according to a local custom, and then motioned him in through a small, oblong doorway such as he had entered before.

Only a minute later, he was standing before the Timur—who, as Will now knew, was the legal ruler of all Le-Mur, a king with powers that were not, indeed, absolute, but were somewhat broader than those of the President of the United States.

Will was astonished to observe that he was being granted a private audience with this great dignitary; in fact, aside from four guards who stood each with a long spear at one corner of the room, he and the Timur were the only occupants of the great vaulted chamber.

As before, the sovereign was sitting cross-legged on a central platform; as before, he was impressive with his venerable appearance, white beard and shining white mantle.

For a moment after Will's arrival, the Timur merely stood looking at him in a grave and troubled manner; and Will, trembling although he did his best to control himself, realized that some important announcement was in store and that a crisis in his own life impended.

"Manu," the Timur at last said (this being an abbreviation of "Man of the Upper Air"), "for ages all contact with your race has been prohibited. Primitives such as you Upper Air folk could only cause damage down here in Le-Mur. Through our earth-piercing radiosopes, we have been watching your doings for centuries; and what we have seen of your wars, revolutions and intrigues has not been such as to make us desire your closer acquaintance. In fact, I am empowered, by a special law, to consign any intruder from the Upper Air to the Obliteration Rooms—"

"Obliteration Rooms?" gasped Will, with a sinking sensation. "What on earth may they be?"

"The rooms where those who do not deserve life are pierced with the Paralyzing Needle, which brings oblivion. But have no fear, Manu. It is not for this that I have summoned you here. I believe that the Providence which governs us all has brought you down to us at the crucial moment, for you can be of great service to all Le-Mur. Do you wish to know how?"

The brows of the Timur were wrinkled with solemn lines as he spoke; his deep blue eyes narrowed thoughtfully with a look of sorrow in which there was at the same time a spark of hope.

"Are you willing to take chances, Manu? Are you ready to risk your life for the sake of Le-Mur?"

As if to punctuate these words, the spears of the four guardsmen came down with a sudden clattering. Then, for a few seconds, a silence that seemed almost leaden ensued.

“Risk my life, O Timur?” queried Will, thinking that perhaps he had not properly caught the meaning of the words. “How so? For what reason?”

“You, Manu, can do what no native of Le-Mur can accomplish. Let me explain.”

Nervously the Timur uncrossed A and then crossed his legs again as he tilted his lean body far forward on his platform of purple velvet.

“First, I must tell you some things about our country, Manu. We threaten today to split into halves—and a land that splits into halves is like an egg with its shell broken. My followers and I have tried to give the people a good rule, and to govern kindly and reasonably. But I have a great enemy, Mur-kambu by name, who has been organizing half of the land against me, and today threatens not only my own reign, but the wellbeing of all Le-Mur.”

The Timur shook his head sadly, and continued,

“The trouble has been brewing for centuries, and is only now coming to a head. You see, Murkambu represents the Science Party; and my followers and I are Anti-Science. Not that we are against science, actually; only that we believe that scientific advances should be restrained, that new inventions should be put to use only when they will be of value to the people as a whole.

“As you know, our civilization is already highly mechanized. We have not only machines, but machines to run the machines—and everything is managed so efficiently that we are hard pressed to find two hours’ work a day to occupy the average able-bodied citizen. Under these circumstances, we hold that further labor-saving devices are worse than useless.”

“Looks that way to me, too,” concurred Will.

“Ah! So then you agree with me! Good!” exclaimed the Timur, his eyes darting lively fires at his visitor. “Then you’ll be so much the better for the secret assignment!”

“What secret assignment?” demanded Will, apprehensively.

“I’m coming to that, I’m coming to that,” the ruler rattled on. “First let me tell you about Murkambu and his Science Party. They believe every new invention should be used to the full, no matter how many men it leaves unemployed and how it throws our life out of its orbit. Whether or not we can digest it, it should be thrown on the market! —as if a man should devour all the food he could lay hands on, even when his stomach was full! Of course, the explanation is that Murkambu and his group—hogs that they are! —are bent on nothing but their private profits.”

“But if everyone has all he wants anyhow, why should they care about private profits?”

The Timur threw up his hands in a despairing gesture.

“Why, indeed, Manu, except that men have the appetites of hungry dogs,

no matter how they are fed. However, Science or Anti-Science—that is after all a political issue, and should be settled reasonably. But a reasonable settlement is the last thing Murkambu wants. He is—to do the devil justice—as brilliant a leader as Le-Mur has ever seen. Owing to his genius for organization, his oratorical talents, his wealth and his unscrupulousness, he has formed a powerful revolutionary party, a real threat against the government of Le-Mur—in fact, it has already usurped hundreds of square miles of territory. The Science platform is, of course, only a rallying call, although it has added many wolves and vultures to the rebel ranks. But Murkambu's real desire is to overthrow the established order, to drive me from power, and to take control of the whole country!"

The Timur tossed angrily on his purple platform as he spoke; his fists clenched and unclenched in nervous spasms. But there seemed to be no relevancy in his words as he went on, impulsively:

"So that is why—that is why, Manu, I have sent for you!"

"That is why you have sent for me?" repeated Will dully. "How so, O Timur?"

"It is like this," the ruler hastened. "Murkambu's faction is so powerful that I fear we may not be able to cope with it. Least of all, if it strikes suddenly—one of the 'terror-blows' which, I understand on the best authority, Murkambu has worked out in secret with his lieutenants. The stroke may be withheld indefinitely; or may fall at any time. That is, frankly, what worries me. If we could only learn the date of the impending outbreak, we would be in a better position to suppress it."

"But can you not learn, O Timur?"

The ruler sighed.

"Perhaps you can answer that for us, Manu. You see, we have already sent out many spies. But all were discovered by means of the Man Detector—which is very sensitive, and, as you know, reveals any human presence within several hundred yards. You, being from the Upper Air, are the only one who can get around this barrier—"

"But did the Man Detector not locate me the moment I entered your world, O Timur?"

A wan smile came to the sovereign's lips.

"That is not what I mean, Manu. Of course, your presence would be detected. But Murkambu and his Science men would have no reason to suspect you of being a government agent. You could claim to have escaped from us, and to be our enemy; and so could enter where none of us could go, and learn secrets hidden from our eyes. With skill and luck, you might even discover the intended date of the Revolution."

"So, you wish me to be a spy, O Timur?"

"Call it what you will. But is it not for a noble purpose—to save our civilization from the plotters who scheme to wreck it?"

Will stared up at that tormented and yet benevolent face, marked with a patriarchal benignity; and had an instant conviction that the Timur had been speaking the truth, and did indeed represent the forces of light in their battle with evil.

"Do not let me coerce you, Manu," the voice went on, sorrowful and low. "I would not intimidate you, if I could—of what value to us would an agent be unless he went of his own free will?"

Over Will's mind there flashed a thought of the dangers involved; and his heart sank as he wondered how he could overcome the monstrous difficulties of maneuvering among strangers, a detective in an unknown world.

But the Timur had fixed him with a gaze that was imploring, almost magnetic. The two eyes fairly blazed with eagerness, with desire; and it seemed to Will that he could not bring to his tongue a protesting "No!" Besides, was there not some voice of adventure within him that cried out, "Yes, go, go!"

And so he heard himself replying, almost as if some automatic power within him had taken hold of his tongue:

"Tell me more, O Timur—more of what you would have me do."

The Timur leaned forward again; smiled and grunted an approving:

"Good! I could see you were no coward, Manu!" And somehow, at those words, Will knew that he was committed to the adventure.

CHAPTER IV AT THE ENEMY'S CASTLE

MURKAMBU, known by his friends as "The Oracle" and "The Shining Leader" and by his enemies as "The Fury," sat behind a great steel-topped desk in the Hall of Science of his private mansion. All about him, along the walls of the enormous domed room, were tiny models of machines—curious devices of wheels, coils, rods, boilers, and web like masses of wires corresponding to nothing ever seen in the world above. Engines shaped like butterflies, and others that looked like giant frogs, and still others that were bat-shaped or spider-limbed or mosquito-like, dangled from cables suspended from the ceiling, giving the place a little of the appearance of a museum of monsters and monstrosities.

Thoughtfully Murkambu stroked his square, cleft chin with a lean, nervous hand; brushed back the long, dyed black hair that fell untidily about

his wide, low forehead; and, with his hawk eyes glittering keenly on either side of his hooked nose, stared at an attendant who, clad in the mud-yellow of the servant class, had just entered through the oblong door at the further end of the room.

"What is it, Gramm?" he demanded, as the servant raised one hand high above his head in token of respect.

"Leader," said Gramm, in oiled, deferential tones, "it is nothing much. Only a fugitive who claims to have escaped the Timur's clutches, and begs leave to throw himself at your feet."

Murkambu leaned far back among the cushions of his chair, smiled faintly, and asked, indifferently:

"Why must he see me? Will not one of the sub-Councillors serve?"

"But this is a different sort of fugitive, O Leader. Do you not remember hearing of the man who came months ago from the Upper Air—"

Murkambu shot forward in his seat with a start. His flashing eyes were all alertness as he broke in.

"Oh, so the man from the Upper Air has escaped and wishes to see me?"

"Yes, O Leader!"

"Show him in at once!"

While Gramm hastened out, Murkambu arose, and, with his hands folded behind his back, began slowly pacing along the aisle between two monster machines whose wide-open shark-like jaws had been painted a bloody red.

It was little more than a minute, however, before Gramm returned, in company with a rail-thin six-footer, whose eyes blinked curiously from behind their tortoise-rimmed spectacles. His clothes—which were of a style never seen in Le-Mur before his arrival—were ragged and torn; his face was bristly with a several days' growth of beard.

"O Leader, I throw myself before you!" he said, using the local formula of respect, but speaking with a foreign accent that brought a dim smile to Murkambu's face.

"Be seated!" invited the latter, pointing to a mat on the floor, where the newcomer squatted cross-legged, while Murkambu returned to his cushioned chair, where he sat perched like an emperor.

"What is it that brings you here to see me, Manu?"

"O Leader, I was kept in confinement by my enemy, the Timur. Yesterday the prison door was left ajar by accident, and I slipped away. I stole through deep labyrinths for many miles, crawling through holes like a rat, lest I be re-captured. At last I came up near your palace, and having heard of you as a great and noble captain—"

“Who told you that?” inquired Murkambu, abruptly.

“I knew you must be. O Leader, since every one mentioned you as the enemy of my enemy, the Timur, against whom I have vowed vengeance for the sufferings he has caused me.”

As he spoke, Will kept his eyes downcast toward the granite floor, seemingly in token of respect. He was remembering how he had rehearsed this very speech; how he had prepared it with the Timur himself; how he had purposely torn his clothes and bestrewn them with dirt and dust; how, with the Timur’s aid, he had crept into an underground corridor leading toward Murkambu’s palace; and how, emerging from this tunnel, he had inevitably been found by Murkambu’s men, who had thus made the present interview possible.

“What is your object in seeing me, Manu?”

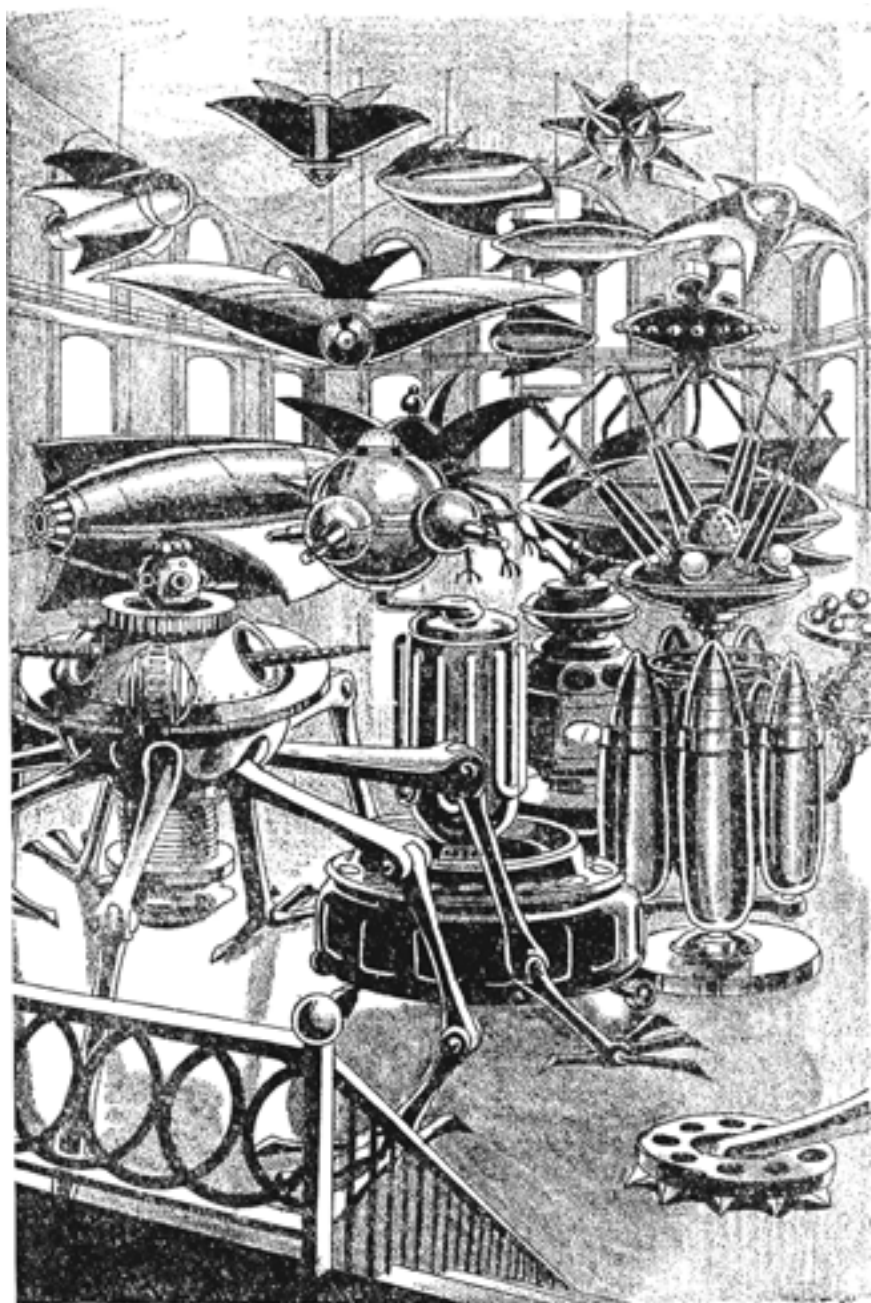
Cool, crisp, skeptical, the tones of Murkambu were not those of a man easily duped.

“Whom else should I see, O Leader? Who else could help me so well to avenge myself? I come to offer you my services. My life is at your disposal—and if anything, I can do can help by so much as a hair’s breadth to put down that tyrant—that devil—that—”

Awkwardly, Will paused; for, with his limited Le-Murian vocabulary, he had run out of epithets by which to characterize the Timur.

But he beat his fist angrily in air, and bit his lip to emphasize his fury; and Murkambu, peering at him keenly, uttered a satisfied grunt, and declared:





"Good! I believe you, Manu! Why should you feel anything but rage at the Timur, after the reception he gave you? He is your enemy because he fears that you, with your knowledge of Upper Air inventions, might hurt the cause of Anti-Science. But we of the Science Party will know how to value you! We will welcome any secrets you may tell us of Upper Air inventions!"

"O Leader, I know little about inventions. But I will help as much as I can!"

"Then it is a promise, Manu!"

Murkambu spoke with an ominous rumbling. His hawk eyes were two black threatening fires that caused Will to shudder in spite of himself.

"Remember, then, it is a promise—and no man can break a promise to Murkambu and expect to live!"

"It is a promise, O Leader!"

"Then lift your left hand, Manu, and repeat these words after me. They are the oath of allegiance to the Science Party."

Will duly lifted his left hand, and mumbled several syllables after Murkambu; whereupon the leader, turning to Gramm, instructed:

"See that he is given suitable quarters, and dressed in the official Science uniform. After that, let him report to me for further instructions."

"It shall he as you say, O Leader," promised Gramm, saluting.

Will, as he turned to leave, could not see the sharp inquiring glance with which Murkambu's eyes followed him.

It is probable, in fact, that he would not have seen a mountain had it risen from the solid earth at that moment. For the oblong door ahead of him had opened, and a vision that caused his heart to flutter crazily bad come gliding in.

For the first startled instant, he did not know if it were merely a ghost—merely the deluding creature of his own dreams. But it was more beautiful than any dream—here, in warm flesh and blood, was that superb creature who had brought him to Le-Mur!

No! there could be no doubt that it was *she*, with the big lustrous violet eyes beneath the pale auburn-crowned brow, the smile of beaming innocence, the fragrance and radiance that only the Chosen One can shed upon any man!

Will stopped short in his tracks at the sight; while she, casting him a glance of smiling curiosity and wonder, passed lightly on her way.

But he did not fail to notice what a deep obeisance Gramm made to her.

"Who may she be," he asked, as soon as he could regain control of himself, "a lady of high rank?"

"Of the very highest, Manu! May the gods bless her and preserve her! She is the youngest and favorite daughter of our leader, Murkambu."

At this information, Will staggered a little, and felt as if a bolt had hit him.

"Her name is Ilwanna," went on Gramm, who was evidently full of the subject. "Ilwanna, the Enchantress. She is known throughout Le-Mur as one of the fairest and wisest of our daughters. Although she is still very young, it is said that never have the fates given any woman a quicker, cleverer mind. In truth, Manu, she is so skilled in science that she has already made several extraordinary inventions."

"Is that—is that why they call her the Enchantress?"

"Yes, Manu, for that reason—and also because of her great beauty. Artists without number have thrown themselves down at her feet, begging to paint her—"

"And is she," demanded Will, rushing on to the question that concerned him most of all, "is she, by any chance—married?"

"She might be so many times over, Manu, if she accepted all the offers that are made to her."

"But she has refused them all?"

"Thus far, Manu. Governors of provinces, statesmen and princes have thrown themselves down before her, but she has rejected all alike. She is wedded, she says, to Science."

Will groaned. If she had frowned on celebrities of her own race, what chance had he? What chance had he in any case, since she was the child of the very man he had been sent to spy upon?

Already he foresaw the dreadful dilemma that was to confront him: of loyalty to the Timur, to whom he had given his pledge, and who represented justice and right; or loyalty to the love that had brought him to Le-Mur. But how could it be that a girl so radiant, so unspoiled and apparently so innocent as Ilwanna could spring from so black a source as Murkambu?

These were the thoughts that occupied Will's mind during the next half hour, when Gramm led him into a long underground storage room and fitted him with the official Science uniform: an affair of black and white stripes, with a close-fitting sleeveless jacket and a sort of kilted skirt that ran only to the knees. The material, of a cobweb lightness and softness, was of the same synthetic substance as all the Le-Murian garments, combining the elasticity of rubber with the downiness of floss.

"Now we'll take you back before the Leader, Manu," said Gramm, surveying the results approvingly. "You're coming to look at last like a man!"

Murkambu echoed the same view a few minutes later, when he gazed at the striped figure who was ushered back before his desk. "It's strange what a difference clothes make in a man," he meditated. "Why, one would almost think you had been bred among civilized people, instead of in that barbarous Upper Air!"

And then, with a swift change of manner:

“Now to business, Manu! I don’t mind confessing I’ve taken quite a fancy to you, and for that reason I’m appointing you one of the Councillors of the Science Party.”

“Councillor of the Science Party?” demanded Will with a start. “How so?”

Gazing at those hawk eyes, which peered out from beneath the black untidy hair as if they would have liked to devour him, Will could hardly believe that here was a man who was favoring him out of mere personal sentiment.

“How so, Manu? Well, it is this way. You come from a land that has far surpassed our own in all the arts of savagery. Judging from what our instruments show of your world, we are mere infants when it comes to spreading fear, destruction and death. Our proposed ‘terror-blow’, which we hope to deliver against the Timur, would benefit greatly by your Upper Air expertness in atrocities. That is my chief reason for appointing you a Councillor, Manu.”

“But what will my duties be, O Leader?”

“As a Councillor, you will have to inspect our secret preparations for the Revolution, and to suggest improvements, based on your Upper Air knowledge. Thus, you may give us the advantage of brutalities beyond our wildest imagination. Thus, also, you may reap revenge upon the Timur! Is it not so, O Manu?”

“It is so, O Leader!”

“Then go with Gramm, and he will lead you into the Annihilation Corridors, and the Fifth Basement, and the other pits where we prepare our attacks against the Timur. Look close and carefully, Manu! Do not hesitate at any suggestions. Remember—nothing is too terrible to try! Our motto is, ‘To make our dreams come true, let us sow a crop of nightmares!’ So out with your Upper Air bestialities! A man with your background will not disappoint us, Manu!”

“I am sure not, O Leader!”

“Then go! On the second day after tomorrow, I will expect you here to report! Now make haste! Look carefully! Think well! For if you show skill and wisdom, you may rise high in the Science Party!”

With an abrupt gesture, Murkambu waved Will and his attendant away. But the newly appointed Councillor, as he started off down the aisle amid the weird intricacy of machines, was torn between conflicting feelings. Here, in his official role with the Science Party, was an ideal opportunity to gain all the desired information for the Timur. But here also was the chance—if he were treacherous enough—to work his way up in the good graces of the Party, to earn the gratitude of Murkambu, and perhaps in the end, if all went well, even to win his way with Murkambu’s daughter.

Muttering an oath, Will fought down this temptation. And, at the same time, he reached the end of the aisle; and, glancing back, received a faint shock. For was it true, or did he only imagine that the hawk eyes of Murkambu were following him with a gleam of amusement, and that the Leader chuckled beneath his breath?

CHAPTER V

MURKAMBU WAAVAS

WILL stood in a low-roofed basement which, smelling like a chemical laboratory, reached for hundreds of yards, its concrete roof supported by multitudes of steel columns. Along the floor, which was paved with granite, thousands of men were creeping on their hands and knees, or lay full-length, wriggling like snakes. Back and forth they twisted and squirmed in coordinated maneuvers, their lines looking like enormous pythons; while, as if to complete the reptilian impression, they gave out a low hissing sound as they moved, accompanied by a rustling as of lithe legless bodies gliding along the earth.

"This is our Rattlesnake Battalion, our Crawl Troopers," rang out the voice of Sub-Councillor Wincu of the Science Party, as he proudly took the new member on a tour of inspection. "It is our theory that, by creeping and sliding underfoot, these will take the enemy by surprise. They will move best in the darkness, protected by an Anti-Ray machine which will neutralize the Man Detector."

Shuddering, Will watched the maneuvers of these creeping squadrons; and recalled how, for days already, he had done nothing but observe Murkambu's preparations for the Revolution. Certainly, the arrangements were thorough! How would the Timur be able to defend himself? What defense would he have, for example, against the so-called Budding Bomb, which broke up into half a dozen scattering parts, each of which in turn scattered into six or eight more parts, before forty or fifty distinct explosions occurred? Or how would he be able to cope with the Electrolyzing Ray, the beat of which caused the instant dissodation of water into hydrogen and oxygen—a reaction which was reversed an instant later, when the two gases, with a devastating explosion, reunited to form water vapor? Again, how fight against the Hysterical Spray, which broke down the nervous systems of the victims, and caused them to go off into wild hysterical outbursts, from which the only release was in death?

"Diabolical! Simply diabolical! Guess the devil himself couldn't do much

worse! Murkambu doesn't need any help from the Upper Air!" Will told himself, as he observed the various war machines. Was it not his duty to inform the Timur of these new weapons? Yes! Clearly, he must slip away to the ruler's palace at the first opportunity!

But this was more easily decided upon than accomplished. It seemed merely accidental, for he was apparently allowed every liberty; but whenever he started toward one of the exits leading into the Timur, a guard with a spear would be blocking the way; or else the entrance would be sealed, or surrounded with impassable pits. During the night (the eight-hour period when the lights were off) Will often thought of stealing away; but always the door of his little underground sleeping chamber would be locked—to guard him "against intrusion," he was told. However, he reassured himself with the thought, "I'll get away when the proper time comes," and, in growing horror, went on with his inspection of Murkambu's war machine.

Several times, during those days, he had caught sight of a figure that made him almost forget his duty to the Timur. Several times he had seen Murkambu's daughter, graciously smiling as ever, as she entered her father's home—a light, tripping, ethereal being, who seemed so wholly in keeping with this world of tinted, vari-colored palaces, so out of tune with the black designs brewing beneath the surface of those very palaces!

Was there not some way for him to speak with this delightful person, to make her acquaintance? At first, he doubted it, for she would go drifting past as if he did not exist; and even when she glanced in his direction, her smile would seem to go right through him. Probably he was a mere cipher in her eyes, he reflected bitterly; he was in the position of a serf who courts the favor of a duchess!

But somehow—though the result might be his humiliation, or his lodgment in a dungeon—he must break down the barrier. He pondered long as to ways and means; but, the more he thought, the more entangled he became in schemes and counter-schemes. And then one day—quite by chance, as it seemed—the problem solved itself.

He had just left Murkambu's palace, after a brief interview with the Leader; and was strolling down a winding walk among pale green and blue fountains. As he turned the curve made by a clump of pansies as tall as a man and with blossoms as large as saucers, he heard light footsteps approaching; and his heart began to beat with a crazy pitter-patter as he came face to face with the very person he hoped and yet dreaded to meet.

He noticed that she smiled as she saw him, with a rippling, ingratiating smile that overspread her entire face; and was about to pass on when Will, feeling her to be not at all unfriendly, made a desperate effort to seize the opportunity.

"Ledala," he said (using a native expression of respect, corresponding to our "Madam"), "Ledala, one moment, please!"

She came to a halt, her violet eyes widening with surprise.

"What is it, Runtuh?" she asked this word being equivalent to our "Sir."

Will, confronted with this direct question, experienced the most embarrassing moment of his life. Imagine his position! he had stopped this lady, yet had nothing to say to her! He had merely the overwhelming sense that here was the object of his hopes, his thoughts, his dreams! Here was the one whom he had come so far and experienced such perils to meet! And now that he had met her at last, his mind refused to work; not an idea came to his brain, nor a sound to his lips, other than a half articulate muttering!

A second or two that seemed endless went by. Will's stunned mind began to recover, and words were forming on his tongue, when he saw the amused smile that broke out on her face, heard her faint tittering, and knew that, in another moment, she would burst into outright laughter.

Then, indeed, he could have wished to sink into the earth! Then, indeed, he could have desired to be a thousand miles from Le-Mur! Yet, the next instant, with a resolute effort, he regained control of himself; overcame his bewilderment; and, though still embarrassed, spoke out of a stern inner necessity—out of the knowledge that, if he lost this opportunity, another would not speedily come.

"Ledala," he said, "you must pardon me. I come, as you know, from the Upper Air, and speak your language but poorly. And so, it is sometimes hard to put my thoughts on my lips."

"That does not tell me why you wished to speak with me, Runtuh," she returned, casting him an arch sidelong glance out of those flashing violet eyes.

Her tones, he thought, were as soft as music; each phrase had a rhythm that was like song in his ears.

"No, it does not tell you why I wished to speak with you, Ledala."

And then, as he asked himself what excuse to make, it came to him that no excuse was possible except the truth.

"Why should anyone wish to speak with you, Ledala? Why, except that it brings pleasure? I should like to know you, Ledala—and if I am too bold, do not blame me too much. Say merely that it is because I am a barbarian from the Upper Air."

Her clear, silver-toned laughter showed that she was not at all offended, merely surprised—and more amused than ever.

"No, Runtuh, I do not think you a barbarian, I have often wondered if the Upper Air could be more barbarous than Le-Mur. And I have wondered what it would be like to speak to an Upper Air man. So I am not sorry you

have spoken. I have often seen you passing through my father's halls, and wanted to ask you a question, Runtuh. What are those handsome bits of jewelry you wear over your eyes?"

"Bits of jewelry—over my eyes?" gasped Will, wondering if Ilwanna was trying to make fun of him. And reaching impulsively toward his forehead, he felt his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"What are they, Runtuh? Nobody here has anything like them. They are such lovely decorations. I think they make a man look *so* attractive!"

As Will observed the girl's approving smile, he felt grateful to nature for having made him near-sighted.

"Tell me, Runtuh, something about your country," Ilwanna went on. "I have always wanted to know how it would feel to live in the Upper Air, with all those terrible open spaces above you—so huge that a person must feel lost! And that big light in the sky, which you call the sun, and the little lights called stars—tell me all about them, Runtuh!"

Will pointed down a little curving walk toward a patch of lawn between clouds of pink oleander flowers.

"Let us go there," he suggested, his heart beating fast at the unhopd-for opportunity. "Then I will tell you all—all you wish to know."

They squatted cross-legged on the grass, according to the local custom; and Will, seeing that flawless youthful face upturned in a glance of beaming inquiry, hardly knew how to begin. But somehow the words struggled to his lips, and he went on and on, and told of the earth above, its ships and its factories, its great cities and wide countrysides, its hills and rivers and mountains; and she listened fascinated, breaking in every now and then with:

"Oh, that must be glorious, Runtuh!" or, "How I should like to see that with my own eyes!"

"Perhaps you will yet see that with your own eyes!" suggested Will; and already wild, impossible plans were forming in his mind. Now that he was face to face with her, and saw how the violet eyes sparkled with an ever-varying light beneath their long flickering lashes, he felt more hopelessly in love than ever, more completely her captive, more utterly chained to whatever part of the earth she might inhabit. Never, never, he thought, could he go back to his own land without her!

He did not know how long he remained with her; it seemed only a few minutes, but may actually have been an hour or two. With rare speed, their acquaintance ripened; having heard much about the Upper Air, she began to tell him many things he did not know about Le-Mur, as well as some things about herself, and how, having taken to science from her early teens, she had had the advantage of her father's laboratory, and had made experi-

ments in chemistry at an age when most girls had no thought except for the cut of their dresses and the arrangement of their hair.

She was enchanted to learn that he too was a scientist, an inventor.

"Most of the men I meet in my father's home are old statesmen," she said. "And I hate statesmen, Runtuh. They are like spiders—always weaving webs."

"Do not call me, Runtuh," he urged. "My name is Will."

"Will? Will?" she repeated, smiling at the odd sound. "It has a pleasant ring on the tongue."

"And I will call you Ilwanna," he dared to suggest—when he saw her leap up with a start, her eyes widening in surprise, wonder, and alarm.

"What is it?" he demanded, as he too sprang to his feet. And then, turning, he saw.

Facing them with a smile that was almost Mephistophelian in its suavity, stood the girl's father, his hawk eyes flashing more keenly than ever, and his hooked nose seeming preternaturally long as it bent toward them like a beak. How many minutes he had been standing there, overhearing their talk, neither of them could say; but furious blushes came to the cheeks of them both, and they gaped and were wordless beneath his ironical scrutiny.

"Do not let me disturb you, my children," he said, in tones that were low, and surprisingly mild considering the outburst they had expected. "I hope you have been enjoying yourselves."

"I just came upon her by accident, O Leader," Will attempted to explain, still expecting a reprimand. "I was—asking her some questions—"

"It is well, Manu. You are a man, are you not—and what man could resist my daughter's loveliness? As a matter of fact, I was about to introduce you, as I wish you to teach Ilwanna some of the Upper Air secrets. You will do that for me, will you not, Manu?"

"If you command it, O Leader, how can I refuse?"

"I do command it. Bless you, my children! Make good use of your time!"

Was it that there was just a faint note of sarcasm in his voice? Was it that there was something slightly sardonic in the twist he gave his black moustache, and in the wrinkling of his heavy cynical lips as he nodded, turned, and passed out of sight behind the clouds of oleander blossoms?

Such were the questions that Will and the girl silently asked as they faced one another again. A shadow had fallen between them; and though they tried to resume their conversation where they had left off, they could not regain their former cheerfulness.

CHAPTER VI
THE NET CLOSES IN

“I NEVER saw anything like it,” said Gramm to his wife Ulu. “No, may I be dropped into the deepest pit and buried alive if I ever saw anything like the way this young Manu runs after. Her Loftiness the Lady Ilwanna. By my head! If they are not always together!”

“Let the cavern roof drop upon me, if that is not disgraceful!” returned Ulu, with a sigh. “What is coming over our Leader? Of old, you know, the man who looked at Ilwanna out of the corner of one eye was as likely as not to end in the Obliteration Rooms!”

“True enough, wife! Yet did the Leader not give a reception for the Manu but a few days ago, and did the young upstart not openly, shamelessly pass most of his time with the Lady Ilwanna? Did I not come across the two of them but a day or two later, huddled side by side beneath a bamboo clump, whispering as though there was no one but the two of them in the whole world? Did I not see them this very morning, behind one of the columns beyond Murkambu’s palace? And what were they doing? Looking into each other’s eyes as if charmed, and holding hands? Did you ever hear of anything so shameful?”

“By the hem of our Leader’s robe!” mourned Ulu. “What is the world coming to?”

This conversation only echoed what was coming to be common gossip. For, although it was only a few weeks since the Upper Air man and Ilwanna had met, they were seen everywhere together—which was a source of great surprise, since Murkambu was known to have been very particular about the company his daughter kept, and to have restricted her men friends to princes and high-ranking politicians. Could it be, people wondered, that he would permit the beauty who had refused so many titled hands to succumb to a mere nobody, a foreigner?

Will himself, amid the delirium of his love, scarcely asked such questions. It was enough for him that he could see Ilwanna almost as often as he pleased; enough for him that she seemed to reciprocate his affection! Surely, as they say, love is blind! Otherwise, he would have known that a naked sword was dangling above his head, would have realized that he was only being played with, as a cat plays with a mouse.

All too soon the bubble was to burst! And the blow, when it fell, was to descend with unexpected savagery.

He had not, it is true, forgotten his pledge to the Timur; nor forgotten

the threatened Revolution, which might wreck the life of Le-Mur. But as day after day went by, and no Revolution broke out, he was lulled into a false sense of security; and began to feel that perhaps after all, despite all Murkambu's preparations, there would be no actual outbreak.

"Another case," he thought, "of the barking dog that does not bite!" In the end, the Timur might not need his aid—and there might be no conflict between his duty to the ruler and his love for Murkambu's daughter!

Then rudely, in one moment, came the awakening. He had just come from a meeting with Ilwanna—a meeting in which, for the first time, he had taken her into his arms, had urged his love upon her, felt the responsive pressure of her arms, and heard her murmured promises of devotion. A man in the state in which he found himself after that meeting can hardly be said to be normal; his head whirled, his thoughts floated on clouds, he scarcely knew that there was a solid earth beneath his feet. And then, breaking into his ecstasy like a bombshell, came cruel realization.

He had received a summons, as many times before, from Sub-Councillor Wincu:

"See me at once!"

Making his way into the cavern-like room that was Wincu's headquarters, he was handed a slip of paper on which a few words were written in the up-and-down style of Le-Mur.

"Read and destroy," murmured Wincu.

He read:

"You are instructed to report at light-fall on the day after tomorrow at the tenth column to the right of these headquarters for R-day activities."

"R-day," as Will understood only too clearly, meant "day of the Revolution." The decisive blow against the Timur was less than forty-eight hours away!

In a room of opalescent glass, whose shimmering pearly walls curved about them like an enormous bell, Murkambu sat face to face with his daughter. His expression was determined, bitter, angry, with just a suggestion of savagery in the way in which he hit into his lower lip; while the girl's cheeks were flushed, her lovely small lips drooped sullenly, and she shrank back on her cushion on the onyx floor, her violet eyes wide open with fear.

"What is that?" her father shot out at her, pushing his square jaw forward with a bulldog thrust. "You dare to defy me?"

"It is not that I defy you," she pleaded, withdrawing from him as far as possible. "It is only that—that I will not act like a traitor!"

"Traitor?" he echoed, giving the word an ironic ring. "Is it nothing, then, to play the traitor to *me*? Listen, my girl! Why do you suppose I have been throwing you in the way of this crawling rat from the Upper Air? Why do

you suppose I have been making it easy for you to meet? —keeping you around the palace after he arrived, and using a thousand wiles so that you two might see one another? Was it that I wanted my daughter thrown away on such foreign trash? You know me better than that, Ilwanna! You knew very well I had my own ends to fulfill!”

“I knew nothing of the kind!” she flashed back, with spirit.

“From the beginning,” went on Murkambu, his voice grown suave, in the manner of one who hides a dagger beneath every word, “did not my secret agents tell me all about him? Did I not know he was a spy? —a spy sent here by the Timur to ferret out my secrets? Was I deceived for one moment by the perfidy in his heart?”

“I do not believe it!” denied Ilwanna, her tiny clenched fists indignantly shaking. “Will—that is, the Manu—is not perfidious!”

“No? Well, that is a matter for me to judge!” roared the Leader. “Do you think I could not have crushed him at any moment like a fly between my two hands? But why did I not do so? Not because I would have had any more compunction than about stepping on any other worm! No! Because it is bad policy to kill a man when he has valuable information that one may drag out of him!”

The girl’s breath came short and fast beneath the pressure of her terror; but she remained silent, staring at her persecutor.

“Being in the Timur’s employ, has he not some of the secrets of his master? The secrets of defense—which my spies have not been able to fathom, because of the Man Detector? Then how can I find out what he knows? Not by direct questioning! Possibly not even by torture! But there is a simpler, softer way. And that is where you come in, Ilwanna. The charm and seductiveness of a woman—will they not extract that which scourges and dungeons are powerless to drag from a man?”

With an exclamation of anger, Ilwanna was on her feet. Her shapely head tossed proudly; her eyes were ablaze as she confronted her parent.

“Oh! So you wish me to act as a decoy to lure him for your ends?”

Murkambu too had arisen. But his manner was controlled, and his tones were quiet as he replied, with just the slightest suggestion of irony:

“Well, my lady, that is one way of putting it. In any case, he is now ripe for probing. I can see it in those silly glances he casts at you—ha, ha, as if you were the only thing in female shape that ever walked this earth! He got to the stage of imbecility even sooner than I expected. So now, Ilwanna, with just a little cleverness, you can learn what I want you to, and then bring me the information. It is little enough for your father to ask of you.”

“I—I do not enjoy being used as a tool!” retorted Ilwanna. She was recall-

ing how, from her earliest days, Murkambu had tried to make use of her for his own purposes; how he had employed her as a bait for his political rivals, whom he had permitted to court her, while drawing advantageous agreements out of them; how he had secretly betrothed her, in the face of her tearful protests, to the doddering old Baron Grimlok, before the would-be bride-groom had, fortunately for her, been removed by a stroke of apoplexy. She remembered how she had never, from childhood, had a word of fatherly affection from this redoubtable parent of hers, and how she had always feared him, and felt that he regarded her as but one of his many possessions.

And so, her breast swelled indignantly, and a feeling that was near to hatred mingled with her dread as she stood there confronting him beneath the pearly walls of that bell-shaped room. But chiefly it was not for herself that she was angry and afraid.

"And what—what will you do with *him*?" she demanded.

"With him? What does one always do with spies? Do you think I would let him live in any case, after the advances he has made to my daughter?"

She compressed her lower lip, and made a resolute effort to keep back the tears.

"Why, it's—it's ungodly!" she at length forced out, with something like a sob.

"Not at all, my girl. Merely good politics. Now will you go to him, like a loyal daughter of mine, and get me that information? If you refuse, well—you will not enjoy my locking you in the Black Tower for a month, as it has been my unfortunate duty to do once or twice before. Also, if you refuse—there will be no use prolonging the life of this earthworm from above. I will have him sent this very day to the Obliteration Rooms!"

"Oh, not this day!" she pleaded, almost in a wail. "Please give us time!"

"Then will you go to him, and get me that information? He is now in the sub-storage department, beneath the Violet Pavilion. If you will go out this way, my lady—"

With the greatest urbanity, Murkambu had reached toward the knob of a little oblong door.

"Just out this way. That's it. I knew you were a good daughter after all. You'll find it much more pleasant, really, than going to the Black Tower. Well, take your time. I'll give you till evening, when you'll find me in my study in the Hall of Science. But don't forget—I'll expect some really valuable information!"

Choking down a sob, Ilwanna turned and hastily went out.

Will meanwhile was wrinkling up his brows and chewing at his lips as he restlessly paced the floor in the sub-storage department beneath the Violet Pavilion. Rarely had any man had to do battle with a more heartrending

problem. Since R-day was at hand, it was clearly his duty to rush off and inform the Timur, so that he might take immediate steps to defend himself. Upon this might depend the wellbeing, the future of all Le-Mur! Yet to fulfill his pledge to the Timur would be to prove unfaithful to his love for Ilwanna.

How would she be able to forgive him for dashing off without a word to her? How forgive his treachery to her father? What explanation could he possibly offer that would make him appear anything better than a contemptible spy and traitor?

Compared to the warm reality of Ilwanna, how pale and unimportant the Timur and his cause now seemed! Yet never in his inmost heart did Will have any doubt of his course. He saw before him the Timur's patriarchal face, white-bearded and lined with trouble; contrasted it with the shrewd, cynical face of Murkambu; and knew in what direction his duty lay. Before his mind flashed the lines of a poet of centuries before, "I could not love thee, Dear, so much loved I not honor more"; and he knew that he too must follow the call of honor.

With a sigh, he started up the stairway into the Violet Pavilion. His senses were alert as a hunted beast's; while, trying to fight down the heaviness that weighed upon him like lead, he skirted a sentry-guarded door; veered aside from two spear-wielding guards who passed him with cold, suspicious glances; glided, without being seen, toward a trapdoor that he knew, and found it locked; and was about to hasten out of the Violet Pavilion when, startlingly, he came face to face with a familiar figure.

But her breathless manner, her pale countenance, her contorted cheeks and hurried gestures told him that here was a creature very different from the serene self-assured Ilwanna he had seen only a few hours before.

She did not take time for a formal greeting.

"Oh, thank the gods, it's you!" she exclaimed. And then, motioning him around a corner into a corridor of blue-veined marble where they could be by themselves, she whispered:

"Hurry! Fly! There's not one moment to spare!"

He stared at her bewildered, in mute inquiry, while she went on, still in a whisper, but with the most eager urgency:

"Fly, I say! They'll be after us! We've not one second to waste!"

Glancing down into those big shining eyes that brimmed with tears, Will demanded:

"We? We've not one second to waste?"

"Yes, *we*," she murmured; and her lips trembled, and he read the unutterable devotion in her gaze. "Make haste, make haste, my love. Whether we live or die, henceforth we will go together."

CHAPTER VII

BLOW FOLLOWS BLOW

THROUGH long underground passageways the lovers hurried, side by side. They descended and ascended stairways; slid down deep chutes; twisted through corkscrew tunnels; and crept into doorways so narrow that Will could barely force himself through.

"All Le-Mur is a labyrinth like this, beneath the main caverns," Ilwanna explained. "Fortunately, I know my way about."

By hasty snatches, she explained to him the nature of his peril; explained, also, her sudden decision to flee with him.

"I have often thought of flying from my father," she said. "Here in Le-Mur we women are supposed to have equal rights; but actually I was his puppet, which he pulled upon a string. Therefore, I am doubly glad to go with you—to the Upper Air—anywhere, my beloved—"

"But first I must go to the Timur," Will confessed, gloomily. "How will you come with me, to your father's mortal enemy—"

"He is not *my* mortal enemy, is he? Besides, he need not know I am my father's daughter! I can disguise myself, can I not? Where do you think I am leading you now but to the home of my faithful old servant Sarpogu, who will take care of the change?"

A few minutes later, on the fifth level underground, they had entered a dingy ill-lighted den, where a wrinkled witchlike old woman threw her arms about Ilwanna.

"Bless you, little daughter!" she exclaimed. "Where do you come from? What are you all in such a flutter about? Why, I have known you since you were no bigger than my forearm, yet never did I see you so excited before!"

"Sarpogu was my nurse for years, after my poor mother died," Ilwanna announced. And then, turning to the old woman, she whispered something into her ear; after which the two of them retired together, and were gone about a quarter of an hour.

When they returned, Will started forward with a gasp. Ilwanna's shimmering cobweb robe had given place to the drah muddy yellow costume of the servant class. Her auburn hair had been dusted over with gray, until it seemed to belong to an old woman. Her pale, flawless cheeks had been stained with a dye which, even on close approach, gave the impression of the ruts and wrinkles of age. She stooped slightly as she walked; and her wide-open mouth showed several blackened, decayed-looking teeth which, only a few minutes before, had been faultlessly white.

Had it not been for the twinkling violet eyes, Will would scarcely have known that this was Ilwanna at all!

"Good for you!" he greeted her. "You are a splendid little actress!"

"We will need all the acting we can do," she replied. And, turning, she thanked Sarpogu; received a small packet of condensed food from her hands; and urged, "Come, Will, let's be going."

Every minute, they knew, was precious. Perhaps by this time his absence, if not Ilwanna's, had been noticed; perhaps pursuers were already on their trail.

"Not until we are near the Timur's palace will we be safe," she whispered to him. "But come! I know every secret passageway!"

Crawling through a dimly lighted gallery that twisted like a serpent, she led him toward a large triangular gateway.

"Once we have passed this," she said, "we will be under the protection of the Timur's soldiers." But, as they drew near, there came an ominous clanking; long spear-pointed bars drew down—and the path was blocked as solidly as by a row of bayonets.

Retreating, they tried another gallery; and this time, instead of the bristling bars, a heavy chain blocked their passage. On a third occasion, a barbed wire meshwork suddenly faced them; and, on the fourth attempt, a shower of arrows shot up from the earth, one of them almost impaling Will.

It was now only too clear that every path would be blocked. The floor of every gallery was planted with one of the so-called "electric mines" which automatically, at the lightest footfall, set up an impassable barrier.

Even as this realization came to them, Ilwanna drew from the inner folds of her garments a little black device no larger than a marble, which she thrust into one of her ears. Then, bending down to the gallery floor, she listened for several minutes.

Resuming an upright posture, she looked solemn, and more frightened than Will had yet seen her. Her disguise could not conceal the trembling of her hands, nor wholly hide the unusual pallor that had overspread her face. Nor could it keep her voice from faltering as she announced:

"It is as I feared. I hear the tramp of marching columns."

"But how? How can you hear them?"

"Listen yourself, beloved!"

She gave him the black marble-sized object; and, putting it in one of his ears, he bent down as she had done.

Surely enough, a low, muffled tramp, tramp, tramp came to his ears!

"It is the Magnetic Sound Amplifier, which I myself invented," she declared. "It attracts the waves of sound vibrating through the earth, and mag-

nifies them more than a million times." But Will was not interested just then in scientific explanations.

"What is the meaning," he gasped, "of the marching columns?"

She cast him a glance which made the answer only too evident.

"Our escape has been noticed," was all she said.

But how avoid the approaching enemy? Obviously, no ordinary hideout would help them; for the Man Detector, with its remorseless rays, would uncover them more surely than would a pack of bloodhounds.

"There is just one last hope," Ilwanna decided, slowly and reflectively. "On the eleventh layer underground—the lowest level—there is an old gallery which has not been used for years, having been condemned as unsafe. It may be that this has been overlooked, and is still barely passable. If you are willing to take the chance—"

"For myself—of course I am willing. But why must you run the risk?"

"Where you go, I go! Come, while we stand here debating, we may both be caught!"

As if to testify to the truth of this assertion, the gallery roof trembled slightly.

"The troops—the troops march just above!" whispered Ilwanna; and, not daring to utter another word, she led the way downward.

They groped through a tunnel so steep that they had great difficulty in keeping their balance; and, after long loopings and windings, came to a circle of darkness resembling the entrance to a coal cellar.

"Surely enough, it *has* been forgotten!" exclaimed the girl, exultantly. "There is not one light burning!"

In Will's eyes, the pitch-black entrance looked far from inviting. But he gritted his teeth; choked down his misgivings; murmured, "Good, let's go on!"; and took out one of the flashlights that he had brought from the Upper Air (the other having been left at his headquarters at the Timur's, for use in emergencies).

Leading the way, he pushed forward foot by foot. The tunnel was so narrow that two persons could not move side by side; it twisted as sinuously as a coiled wire; it was filled with noisome odors, as of a long-closed basement; and was hot as a desert day, since the refrigeration system did not apply here.

Puffing, panting and sweating, Will had a sense of imprisonment, which only grew as he pressed on; a sense of impending catastrophe, which he could not shake off. Several times, turning to Ilwanna, he begged her to go back, in order to spare herself the torment and peril; but always her laughter rang out, clear and reassuring.

"And where is there that you can go, beloved, and I cannot follow?"

At last they came to a point so narrow that they doubted the possibility of further penetration.

"Better let me go ahead just a little to explore," suggested Will, and forced his way forward a few yards. It was strange that his premonition of disaster, so active until now, was slumbering at this very moment when it should have been most awake!

"Wait, I'm coming too!" he heard Ilwanna crying. But almost before her weirdly echoing tones had died down, they were drowned by another sound, a sudden thundering and crashing, accompanied by such a shaking of the earth that Will was thrown off his feet. For several seconds the commotion continued, then subsided to a crunching and grating that rapidly faded out. But what was that scream which Will had heard or thought he had heard at the height of the tumult?

More startled and bewildered than hurt, he picked himself up; observed with a shock that everything about him had gone black; and, reaching automatically for his flashlight, found that the lens and light-bulb had been shattered as he fell.

"Ilwanna!" he cried, in terror for her sake. "Ilwanna! Ilwanna!"

As from an enormous distance, her voice came to him:

"Here I am, beloved! I am not hurt! But you—are you safe?"

"I am safe!" he shouted back. "Wait there for me! I am coming!"

Even as he started toward her, a sharp obstacle imposed itself in his way. His hands, groping in the darkness, felt a hard, irregular shape, as of a boulder. And above this shape he felt others, of buge size, the whole forming a massive barricade.

"Be careful, beloved, lest you displace other rocks!" he heard Ilwanna's voice coming to him in a wail. "They have had rock slides before—that is why they called this gallery unsafe. The pressure of your weight as you passed—it was enough to make the roof fall!"

"Thank God, the rocks missed us both!" he exclaimed.

"Thank God, there is an open space between, so that we may talk!"

"But who are we to thank," he groaned, "that we're on opposite sides of this infernal rock-fall? Maybe, if I try, I can clear some of these stones away—"

"No, no, by the Timur's beard, don't!" she warned, in a voice shrill with alarm. "That might start another slide!"

"But how the deuce can we get out now?" he mourned. His head, reeling in that hot, devitalized air, was unable to do battle with the problem. Were they both to perish there in that foul tunnel?

"What does it matter if we die, so long as we die together?" he heard her say, as if in echo of his thoughts.

Then, before he could attempt an answer, he was startled by a sound from the far distance. Thud, thud, thud! with a dull monotonous insistency, gradually growing louder, until it seemed as if he could hear the crashing and pounding of his approaching doom!

"What is it?" he gasped. "What can it be?"

But the answer was already on Ilwanna's lips.

"The troops! I should have known it! The troops have heard the rock-slide! They're coming to investigate!"

Surely enough, vague shadows began to move from far down the gallery. Looking through a crevice between two fallen rocks—a crevice only a few inches across—he could see the wavering reflections. As yet the light-bearers were hidden around a turn in the corridor; but the green rays of their lanterns, flickering dimly through the tunnel walls, were more terrifying than a visible menace.

"Be of good heart, beloved. It is only the troops approaching," Ilwanna consoled him; but the tones of her voice betrayed that she was shuddering.

Thud, thud, thud, the noise grew louder and more ominous. Then suddenly, around a turn in the corridor, a tall figure swept, a dull green radium lantern burning in one hand, the keen steel of a spearpoint glittering above his right shoulder. Behind him, in close succession, others followed, although to Will's eyes they were as a mere troop of shadows, of ghosts.

"Ah," the leader exclaimed, his eyes falling upon Ilwanna, who, in her disguise, he could not recognize. "What dog of a spy have we here? Come, you dirty wretch, out with you!"

With a wrench, the newcomer had jerked Ilwanna forward by the arm. And Will, observing this act and hearing her murmur of protest, felt a savage desire to leap to her aid. Oh, could he only have burst through the rock wall! But was any lover ever in a more cruel position? Powerless to lift a finger to help her, he saw her lashed about with ropes; heard her cry out in shrill indignation; heard the mocking laughter of her captors; and heard one of the men exclaim:

"Away with her! We will bring her to our good master Murkambu, who makes short shrift of spies!"

"Oh, not to Murkambu!" the victim protested, terrified. "Do not take me to Murkambu!"

Her captors only laughed; while Will, clutching at the rocks in his rage, called out a challenge:

"Hurt one hair of her head, and, devil take you, I'll—"

“Oh, so there’s another!” shouted one of the soldiers, aware for the first time of Will’s presence. “By the lamp of my eyes! Another spy! Let us take him too!”

With an eager thrust, the man started forward. But, even as he did so, the unexpected once more intervened. There came another roaring in Will’s ears, the rumble of walls collapsing, the crash and thunder of falling rocks; and Will, knocked to the earth by the force of the upheaval, was momentarily stunned.

Recovering himself with an effort, he realized that the fissure in the rocks had been sealed. Everything about him was dark and silent as death; and there was no answer when he beat his fists against the rocks, and called out, in choking, sobbing notes:

“Ilwanna! Ilwanna! Answer me, Ilwanna! Answer! Ilwanna, Ilwanna, are you still alive?”

CHAPTER VIII

THE HOUR STRIKES

SLOWLY, blindly, like a man in a bad dream, Will began groping his way down the black tunnel. He had no further hope of any response from Ilwanna; the second rock-slide had evidently done its work all too well!

“God! Why didn’t it catch me, too!” Will muttered to himself, in his despondency; but, remembering his duty to the Timur, he knew that he had no choice but to go on and seek to extricate himself.

This task, however, seemed hopeless. He did not know for how many hours he wandered back and forth sagging with the heat, half delirious with thirst, his tongue hanging out like an exhausted dog’s, his head aching, his eyes useless in that impenetrable darkness. He knocked his head against jutting walls, stubbed his toes, bruised his shins and elbows; he tripped, and recovered himself; he sat for brief intervals on the rugged floor to rest, then arose and crept or stumbled on his way.

It was not long before he realized that he was lost. The tunnel branched in several places; he chose his course at random, and had to make blind guesses. Several times, when the gallery led sharply downward, he retraced his path; once he slipped down a ten-foot descent, and, torn and scratched, was unable to make his way back. And finally, near to fainting, he flung himself full length on the floor, his breath coming hard, his head swimming, his skin burning hot; while his fevered mind formed visions of how, perhaps for

ages, his bones would lie here in this blank depth, unburied, undiscovered, until at last the cavern roof fell in above them.

But again, he arose and struggled on, stumbling and creeping, more often on all fours than erect. It seemed that an epoch of torment went by before, long afterward, he was aware of a dim light shining somewhere ahead.

He approached it; it appeared far away, appeared to retreat as he advanced; he felt that he had not the strength to reach it. But gradually the light brightened; and there came a moment when, at a turn in the tunnel, he found himself approaching the entrance of an illuminated gallery, where a cool breath showed that he was returning to the air-conditioned regions.

It was there that, an hour or two later, a company of armed scouts found him as they made their regular rounds. He lay unconscious, apparently lifeless, and it was long before they could revive him. Even after his eyes opened and the power of speech came back to him, he looked about him doubtfully and with fear.

"Who are you? Murkambu's men?" he mumbled, wondering if he had endured so much merely in order to fall into the power of his enemy.

But at the mention of Murkambu, the leader of the scouts spat out in disgust.

"No! by our honor! We are loyal troops of His Loftiness the Timur!"

"Thank God!" sighed Will, and sank back into unconsciousness.

Many hours more had passed before he was in a condition to see the ruler. Then, rested and fed, and with his soiled and gashed clothes replaced by a clean, fresh robe, he was led back to the edifice of many-domed crystal where the Timur held court.

To his surprise, a great change had overcome the whole region. Enormous walls of rock had been thrown up, in some places completely hiding the bubble palaces. Black screens had been erected in front of the mushroom temples; a meshwork of deep trenches threaded the earth; heavy wire entanglements marked "Keep off!" lined the walks among the fountains and flowers. And everywhere were brusque, black-clad men carrying spears and long, gray, steel machines of about the size and shape of a baseball bat.

"What in blazes has come over the place?" Will wondered. But he was not to be long in finding out.

Once again, he was led through a little oblong doorway into the crystalline palace; down a long-arched corridor that glowed with translucent rose and gold; and into a great vaulted chamber where dozens of men in long flowing robes were squatted cross-legged on the floor.

In the center, also cross-legged, the Timur sat upon his platform of purple velvet. But it seemed to Will that he looked years older; his back, previ-

ously erect in spite of his years, now seemed stooped beneath an invisible weight; and his face appeared thinner and more lined.

Upon seeing Will, who reached down and touched the floor three times with his left hand in the prescribed ceremony of respect, the Timur motioned to the assembled company in a gesture of dismissal; and, after they were gone, turned to Will, and inquired, in a sad and weary voice:

“Well, Manu, what have you found?”

As briefly as possible, Will reported what he knew of Murkambu’s preparations.

“He plans to strike the great blow immediately!” he ended breathlessly. “Less than forty-eight hours from when I left—and I do not know how much time has passed.”

In such excitement did the Timur lean forward that Will thought he was about to fall off his pedestal.

“What’s that?” he demanded. “By my robe, Manu! Just what did you hear?”

Will mentioned the day and hour, according to the local way of reckoning time. And, at this announcement, the Timur’s blue eyes seemed ready to pop out of his head. He gave a still more agitated start, twisted about on his purple platform, and exclaimed, in a long-drawn voice of despair:

“Why, that gives us only one hour more!”

Paralyzed by the blow, the ruler seemed unable to warm himself into action.

“I knew it would happen!” he muttered into his beard. “I knew it! Haven’t I been taking defense measures? Haven’t I been building electric barricades, to smite the enemy with the sting of death? And Ray Screens, to ward off the poison Infra-Red light beams? And Boomerang Nets, to catch and hurl back the enemy’s projectiles? Haven’t I ruined our beautiful land? What will be left of it all when the attack is over?”

“Come, you must rouse yourself—take action, Your Loftiness! At once!”

“Take action, Manu? But how? From what direction will the attack come? Against what should I defend myself? Murkambu will strike in the dark, with secret new weapons. I have not the forces to defend myself—no, in spite of all my preparations! I have not the forces, Manu! Not unless I make use of secret new weapons!”

“What secret new weapons have you, Your Loftiness?”

The Timur thought for a moment, and his face appeared graver than ever.

“Nothing that is not too terrible to use. No, nothing not too terrible to use, Manu. Locked up in my private vaults, there are—”

Interrupting him in mid-sentence, a uniformed man dashed in through the rear door. Disheveled, panting, red-faced, he entered without formality;

pressed forward, half reeling, to the Timur's pedestal; and, without taking time to prostrate himself or salute, burst out, in a broken voice:

"Your Loftiness—Your Loftiness—"

"What is it, Eru?" demanded the ruler, his twitching fingers eloquent of his concern.

"Your Loftiness," rushed on the newcomer, gasping. "Your Loftiness—tidings for you!"

"What tidings?"

"Murkambu's men—his Crawl Troopers—they have stormed us on the Seventh Layer. They have broke—have broken through our first Column of Defense!"

All too clearly Will remembered the troops he had seen crawling and squirming in a great serpentine.

"They have wound their way in snake-like," went on Eru, with a wail. "Crushed our advance guard with a rattlesnake twist! Many of our men are in flight, O Leader! There seems no way to beat the enemy back."

The Timur groaned. In tones so low and rapid that Will could not follow the words, he snapped out a series of orders. Then, coming down from his pedestal and taking up a pronged staff, he started in stately dignity across the room.

"The hour is come," he said, "when we must give our all for Le-Mur and be ready to die in order that right may live."

CHAPTER IX

THE CRAWL TROOPERS ADVANCE

OUT of a thousand tunnels, which appeared at sudden unexpected places in the earth, the black-and-white striped troops of the Science Party were pouring. They shot from the ground in little buzzing machines, which leapt forward like grasshoppers; they crawled down from the roof of the Great Cavern, and swung themselves to the floor on spider-like cables; they squirmed in their serpent columns around the buildings and over the rock-piles; they pointed their weapons, shaped like baseball bats; and let out showers of blue sparks, which immunized the electrical defenses. Barricades crumbled before them like paper; while thousands of citizens fled shouting and screaming, jostling one another as they dived into deep pits for safety; or falling head-long with mortal shrieks as they were pierced by the flame-red holts launched by the invaders.

Meanwhile, in a small closed compartment five layers underground, the

Timur sat with a small corps of his advisers. Through a combination radio and television machine, he had been following the invasion; and his eyes were moist as he watched the rapid advance of Murkambu's followers.

"I knew we were not prepared," he mourned, "but I never suspected the enemy could take us so by storm."

"O Timur," said Will, who stood at his side, "what of the secret weapons you said you had?"

The Timur sighed.

"Never did I suppose I would descend to using them. They are savage enough, Manu, to be worthy of the Upper Air!"

"Yet you are going to use them?"

"I myself have this day persuaded him," declared General Massupu, a bulldog-faced figure who stood to the ruler's right. "His Loftiness was very reluctant; but I have convinced him that the end justifies the means."

"I fear that the end will be ruin!" mourned the Timur.

"The end will be victory!" dissented Massupu. "Wait and see! In only a few minutes now, the new inventions will be in operation. We will witness the results through the Sound-Sight Relayer."

With a confident gesture, the General pointed to a great chest-like case, from which scores of rubber tubes emerged, in masses like a Gorgon's hair. This, Will knew, was the radio-television machine; by adjusting the appropriate tubes to eyes and ears, every person in the room might be a long-range spectator of the battle.

"Yes, the new inventions will save us!" Massupu went on, with smiling assurance. And, indeed, it soon began to look as if he spoke the truth! For Will, by means of the "Sound-Sight Relayer," gazed upon a strangely altered battlefield.

First he observed the bubble palaces, the mushroom temples, with the invading columns winding among them in their thick serpent-like masses. Then suddenly, out of the earth, iron snouts several feet across emerged, looking a little like the heads of gigantic metal drills. And from each of these machines, almost instantly, there uprose a gleaming muzzle, like a huge rapid-fire gun, which shot a long white streak, apparently of solid matter, to the accompaniment of a roaring which, in spite of the dimming effects of the machine, was almost too much for the listener's ears. Each streak struck one of the columns of men, which melted away before it like ants before a hurricane; each, swerving to right and left, obliterated whole battalions.

Deadly tanks that bored up from within the earth!

But they did not stop with the destruction of the men. One bored its way like a series of sixteen-inch shells through the buildings, which collapsed

one after one, to the accompaniment of a Titanic crashing and thundering. And in places, where a white streak struck the ground, the solid rock seemed to dissolve before it, while great steamy clouds arose and hid the wreckage.

Then, when by degrees the mists cleared away and the white streaks had vanished, Will could see only the broken steel bones of towers, the glitter of shattered glass, the jumbles of stone and steel where the exquisite courts and temples had stood. All were drenched as by a flood; great pools of water stood all about; and muddy streams flowed in all directions.

Will did not need to be told what had caused the devastation. It had all been done by the power of water! Hydraulic spouts, under such pressure as to release the liquid with a bullet's speed, were as savage destroyers as solid projectiles. The principle was already familiar in the Upper Air, in hydraulic mining that tore down whole mountainsides—the Le-Murian weapons merely represented an extension of the same idea!

"By my beard," mourned the Timur, as he staggered away from the Sound-Sight Relayer, "at the rate we're tearing things up, we won't be much better off if we win than if we lose!"

"Quite the contrary, Your Loftiness!" enthused General Massupu. "Why, it gives me a sense of artistic satisfaction, the way we wiped the enemy out. But wait! We haven't finished yet! The other inventions are still more wonderful!"

Turning back to the Sight-Sound Relayer, Will saw something that looked like a gigantic flaming eagle launched into air from a hidden tube. It floated through space, midway to the roof of the Great Cavern, and gave off crimson sparks as it advanced; while following it by adjusting the instrument as it moved toward Murkambu's domains, Will saw how it swooped with orange-red drooping talons upon a great domed building. For an instant it hovered above the roof, as if held back by some conscious reluctance; then fell—and, in a sudden scarlet puff, the building was gone.

"Well, what do you think of our eagle torpedo?" General Massupu demanded. "Ought to cost the enemy a good deal before we're done, don't you think?"

But Will, as he observed the debris of the once-proud edifice, felt a regret that he could not wholly account for, as at the death of something rare and priceless. Was it that the thought of Ilwanna was in his mind? That he knew that she, if alive, would be in just such a place as the eagle torpedo had destroyed? But no! She had been crushed in the rock-slide! It could make no difference to her what bombs were launched or what buildings wrecked!

"The principle of the torpedo is really very simple," he heard Massupu explaining, jubilantly. "Buoyed up in an envelope of hydrogen, it can travel forty or fifty miles through the air with its cargo of deadly explosives. Then,

when it strikes, the hydrogen, igniting, will make the explosion all the more destructive. But look at *this* weapon!"

Once more Will's eyes and ears were fastened on the Sight-Sound Relayer, and noted a scene that was spectacular if not beautiful. Through the air, high up toward the roof of the Great Cavern, long colored filaments were moving. Ribbon-like and wavy, they extended in lines of orange and vermilion, indigo and lemon, emerald, sapphire and ruby, which bent and twisted like colossal sky-serpents and rapidly moved westward toward Murkambu's headquarters.

At first, they seemed so much like the parts of some harmless and fantastic exhibition that it was hard to believe them the agents of death. But Will, observing them as they came to earth with swift and sinuous windings after traveling for miles, saw how every man and woman within many yards fell as if struck by a bullet, quivered for a moment, and then lay still.

"These are the Sky Serpents," stated General Massupu. "They are composed of poison gasses, which loop and squirm so horribly that once we have launched them they are out of control, and neither we or the enemy can tell where they are to descend."

"You believe these inventions can win the war?" asked Will.

General Massupu nodded. "Murkambu will have no chance. Within a few weeks the Science Party will be defeated by science."

The events of the next several days did, indeed, seem to bear out this prediction. With the introduction of the secret weapons, a sharp turn in the tide of battle was noted. Will, listening and watching beside the Timur and his advisers, heard the jubilation as the invasion was thrown back mile after mile; as Murkambu's crawl-troopers were scattered or chased into the depths of the earth; as all the Science warriors were cleared out of the districts they had overrun; and the Timur's forces prepared to take the offensive in the territory still under rebel control.

"This will be the end of Murkambu!" predicted General Massupu, as he exultantly followed the various engagements through the Sight-Sound Relayer.

Will, convinced of the truth of this forecast, now began to think of returning to the Upper Air. A deep, unceasing melancholy had possessed him ever since the loss of Ilwanna; he knew that he could never find peace without her here in Le-Mur. On the other hand, how could he return to his own land until he knew beyond any question what had happened to her? Even though he had ceased to hope, he must have positive information as to her fate! And for that he must wait until the war was over and he could again enter her father's territory.

But meanwhile, strange and disastrous events were to intervene.

One day, upon descending to the Timur's underground retreat, Will found the ruler looking particularly depressed. Little blue hollows had formed beneath his eyes; his long, sagacious face drooped, and his cheeks were crisscrossed with down turning grooves. He hardly acknowledged Will's salute; but, gazing straight ahead with a sad, fixed stare, remarked:

"It is just as I thought, Manu. The new weapons are of no use after all."

"Of no use, O Timur? But have they not driven the enemy back?"

"Yes, for a while, Manu. But there is an old saying of our people: 'The tricks taught to the right hand can be learned by the left.' Look through the Sound-Sight Relayer—and you will see!"

Will did as directed; and saw the black-and-white striped columns of Murkambu advancing in a long serpentine across a plain littered with heaped and broken masonry. Out of great spouts, aiding their advance, poured white devastating streams of molten metal; above them, gigantic torpedoes floated through the air toward the enemy; while flashing streaks of lightning reached out in long manners.

"Good God!" Will exclaimed. "They've improved on our inventions!"

"Exactly!" groaned the Timur. "Which means we're as sadly off as ever. They've already taken back most of the land we recaptured from them. What's more, we don't seem able to stop their advance. They also have a wholly new weapon—and it's more terrible than any of ours."

Will, peering and listening through the instrument, was aware of a prodigious apparition just rising above a little ridge of ground. Shaped like a tiger, with great black and tawny stripes, it seemed larger than an elephant as it came springing forward in a series of stupendous bounds. From its wide-open red mouth, a purple vapor fumed; its claws, slashing at the ground whenever they touched it, left gashes many feet wide. Its eyes were yellow blazes so bright that Will could hardly bear to look; and from its throat there issued a bellowing as of an infuriated bull.

Appalled, and not quite sure whether it were an actual beast, Will watched the monster approach. Then all at once, with such force that it caused the very instrument to tremble, the giant flew apart—scattered into hundreds of fragments, each of which burst with loud detonations and showers of crimson sparks. It was several minutes before the upheaval had subsided; and, when all was quiet again, the earth over hundreds of acres was turned up as by a titanic plow.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the watcher. "That *is* worse than any of our weapons."

"You don't know the most terrible part of it, either," the Timur announced, with a sigh. "The gases released by the explosions have a peculiar effect.

Everyone who inhales them suffers a peculiar lassitude, which may wear off in a few days, but leaves the victim without will power for a time. Or, rather, I should say the will is paralyzed, through some strange action of the gas upon the nervous system. Thus, thousands of our troops, from the Generals down, have been left without the desire to fight, and have been taken prisoners without resistance."

"But can't we imitate this invention?"

"By the time our chemists would be able to analyze and copy it," groaned the Timur, "there will be nothing left of us! No, I'm afraid, Manu, we're at the end of our resources."

Will reflected for a moment. And, as he did so, an idea shot into his head—an idea so striking, and yet so simple, that he wondered why it had never occurred to him before.

"O Timur," he said, turning to the sovereign with a confident smile, "I believe I have a way of throwing back Murkambu and his hordes."

CHAPTER X

BLUE NITROLENE

SOLEMNLY, questioningly the Timur sat staring at Will. His blue eyes were grave with thought; his brows were wrinkled; doubt and perplexity were written in his manner.

"That is a wonderful invention, O Manu, if it is all that you claim. What do you call it?"

"Blue Nitrolene, O Timur. I have experimented upon it for years, and believe it the deadliest weapon ever invented, though the government of my own country would not buy it from me."

"I can well understand that, Manu. If it is all that you say, it is too terrible to be entrusted in human hands. For grown men are but infants when one gives them the tools to destroy. What did you say the principle of this Blue Nitrolene is?"

Will explained how the chemical, a compound of nitrogen, carbon, sulphur and phosphorus, acted as an atomic catalyzer, breaking up the heavier and more complex elements to form the simpler, and consequently causing solid matter to disappear amid a stupendous release of energy.

"Have you the formula with you?" questioned the Timur.

"No, but have I not worked at it for years, making the substance time after time, so that I know every detail of the process by heart. I know your laboratories, Loftiness, are well equipped. I will have no trouble in showing

your chemists how to make Blue Nitrolene. It shall not take long—within twenty-four hours, I promise you, you shall have a supply!”

“And what is to prevent the enemy from copying it, Manu? So that we all will be worse off in the end?”

“Before the enemy can study it, they will be defeated, O Timur.”

“Then has this invention ever been tried in warfare?”

“Never, Your Loftiness. Yet I know what it will accomplish.”

“And even if we win, Manu, this weapon will remain in Le-Mur, waiting to be seized by some new rebel leader, who will use it to blow the country to bits. No, Manu! A deadly invention may be worse than any human enemy.”

Argue as he would, Will could not convince the Timur. Precisely because the weapon promised to be so effective, the ruler refused to employ it!

And, indeed, except for an unforeseen event, it probably never would have been employed.

A few hours later, a conference of the Timur’s advisers had gathered in his little underground retreat. General Massupu had just finished a long address, in which he declared that, at the rate Murkambu was advancing, the defending forces could not hold out for another forty-eight hours.

No sooner had he sat down than a tremor, as of an earthquake, was felt. Almost instantly, it was followed by a severer tremor, so violent that all the occupants of the room were flung about like dice in a box. And while they cried out in terror and a third tremor rocked the room, an enormous bulge appeared in the ceiling, and a great pointed mass of metal protruded.

It was a minute before the men, stunned and bruised, were able to recover themselves sufficiently to examine this object.

“By my head! A torpedo!” exclaimed General Massupu, as he staggered up to the metal. “Thank the blessed fates, it was a dud! Otherwise, none of us would be here to tell the story!”

“How could it be a torpedo?” questioned Will. “I thought we were a hundred feet below the Great Cavern.”

“Yes, but evidently,” Massupu sighed, “Murkambu has torpedoes which will burrow a hundred feet through earth and rock.”

A long pregnant silence greeted this remark.

“That means that no matter where we go,” at length declared the Timur, “we will not be safe from attack.”

“It means the end!” groaned Massupu.

“That is, O Timur,” suggested Will, “unless we are willing to try Blue Nitrolene.”

The Timur smoothed out his ruffled robe, and stroked his long beard thoughtfully.

"It is either surrender—or the new weapon!" asserted Minister of Defense Hamur.

"There is no time to lose, either," put in Massupu. "Shall it be said that we gave in when even the tiniest chance for victory remained?"

"Victory? Victory?" flung back the ruler, as his tall tottering form paced the floor in agitation. "What victory can there be now? No matter how the war ends, we are all defeated! Our lives are blasted, our country torn up! Our only choice is the least among many evils!"

"The least among many evils is Blue Nitrolene, O Timur!"

But the sovereign still hesitated; and might have continued to hesitate, had a fresh upheaval not shaken the room for more than a minute with earthquake throes. This time no protruding mass of metal was seen; but all faces were pale, all eyes distended with alarm.

"You see, Your Loftiness," said General Massupu, "there is no tunnel deep enough to protect us."

"True," admitted the Timur, sadly. And then reluctantly, bitterly, in the manner of one who passes a death sentence. "Perhaps, as you may say, Manu, Blue Nitrolene is the least among many evils. Largun-see, our Minister of Chemistry, will conduct you to our laboratories, whose entire facilities are to be placed at your disposal. It is my order!"

But as Will arose and started out in company with Largun-see, the Timur's gloomy mutterings followed him.

"Heaven help us now! Heaven forgive me for this choice!"

Never had Will seen any laboratory so excellently equipped as the one to which Largun-see led him. Covering several acres of a gallery below the Great Cavern, it was provided with every instrument that Will had ever seen or imagined, and scores that he had neither seen nor imagined. There was every variety of test-tube and retort; electrical devices for converting great quantities of water instantly into steam, and for turning steam to ice; inter-atomic machines, shaped like siege-guns, for dissociating the elements; engines, looking like cabinet radios, which would make qualitative analyses of most substances as rapidly as an adding machine would total a column of figures; as well as immense quantities of most of the less unstable elements and more common compounds.

Best of all! —there were dozens of skilled assistants ready to serve Will's every now and call—a striking contrast to the one-man home laboratory where he had previously worked and made all his discoveries!

Thanks to these facilities, it was only a few hours before he was in possession of some of the innocent-looking sea-blue compound that was to decide the fate of Le-Mur.

CHAPTER XI

THE DESTROYER BREAKS LOOSE

WILL has always maintained that he never made more than a few grams of Blue Nitrolene during all this time in Le-Mur. He has always claimed that this amount, although capable of causing prodigious damage, would not of itself have sufficed to produce the unparalleled catastrophe that brought his days in the underground world to their dread climax. Some unidentified foreign substance, in quantities almost too slight for detection, must have been mixed with the Blue Nitrolene in the course of its manufacture, and produced a change in some of its essential characteristics, and a heightening of its potency.

Such, at least, is Will's explanation. For the fact remains that Blue Nitrolene, terrible as it was in the experiment that I witnessed in Will's laboratory, proved inconceivably more frightful among the caverns of Le-Mur.

Only a few hours after the first mild-looking particles had been produced in the laboratory, the forces of Murkambu were to be confronted with a new weapon—and one that, for sheer horror and destructiveness, put to shame such puny devices as the Eagle Torpedoes and the Sky Serpents.

It was a company of Crawl Troopers who first encountered the Blue Nitrolene as they wound, bellies to earth, through one of the wide branching galleries beneath the Great Cavern. Their advance had been strangely unimpeded; and, feeling that the Timur's resistance was about at an end, they had gone forward for miles, and were ready to sweep into the main cavern itself and take possession of some of the outposts of the Timur's capitol. Then suddenly, in front of them, through a long narrow shaft in the earth, a projectile was dropped.

It was no larger than an orange, and consisted of a glass sphere, which shattered on striking and released several tiny pale blue particles. But no sooner had the foremost of the Crawl Troopers caught a glimpse of the blue specks than a change came over the entire scene.

Almost instantly, there was a hissing as of a thousand steam exhausts in simultaneous action. Spouts of smoke, and clouds of sulphurous vapor shot toward the cavern roof; a bubbling arose from the floor, which began to glare and seethe, with an effervescence as of a powerful acid devouring a metal; and, extending from small foci, the bubbling patches spread in concentric circles, like slowly widening ripples on a pond . . . until, after a minute or two, the entire floor was a molten, fuming, blazing mass.

At the same time, a torrid heat shot out from the center of infection. The

skins of the men were blistered, their eyebrows were singed, the clothes of some of the foremost took fire. Panic arose among them; with cries as of trapped animals, they sprang to their feet; and, thrusting, shoving, squirming, fighting with fists and elbows, they battled their way back toward safety. But many of them, overcome, lay writhing in the path of the destroyer, whose hissing, seething waves spread out to consume them.

Before the day was over, a score of companies of Murkambu's troops had met the same fate. Every advance guard of the rebels had been routed; and several of the main contingents had been driven back before the glowing, steaming fury that was everywhere dissolving the solid rock and earth.

Within less than three days, raids had been made into Murkambu's territory, and bombs containing small quantities of the blue destroyer had been dropped by "do-and-die" squads of loyal soldiers—one or two of whom, unexpectedly, survived and returned to tell of the consternation they had caused, the disruption of normal life, the panic flight of the populace, who fled in stampeding crowds, while the sizzling foe ate through the pavements of cities and the walls of buildings with an insatiable, irresistible, unceasing rapacity.

The Sight-Sound Relayer, meantime, had confirmed the stories, and had shown streets gashed with enormous craters, which slowly widened, while black fumes arose from the flaming depths; solid hillsides which melted, and ran in rivers that gradually dissolved in gas; and great masses of machinery, with steel rods, wheels and boilers, which disappeared like kindling wood in a conflagration.

It seems strange, when one recalls the subsequent cataclysm, that the general danger was not at first realized. It was thought—and Will confesses that he shared in the general delusion—that only Murkambu's territory was menaced. Hence there was rejoicing among the Timur's followers.

"A few days more, and we will have crushed Murkambu's resistance!" they said. "A few days more, and we will have won the war!"

Time was to prove their predictions correct—so far as they went. But it was also to prove that they did not go far enough.

One day the Timur was sitting in his underground retreat, amid a group of his advisers. Although it had been impossible for him to return to his palace of many-domed crystal, which had been wrecked by rebel raiders, he was in a happier mood than for many weeks. He was smiling once more with his old patriarchal benignity; and the luster had come back into his eyes, which had been wont to look dull and faded of late.

"Yes, Your Loftiness," General Massupu was informing him, "there are only a few more active contingents of Murkambu's troops in the field—and it will take us but another day or two to subdue them."

"Thanks be to the Manu!" exclaimed the ruler, fervently, with a nod in Will's direction. "We will have to decorate him with the Purple Plume of the Loyal Defenders, the highest honor we can grant."

"But the ruin caused by this war—it will take us many years to repair it!" sighed Minister of Construction Zampum. "Our cities are mere debris—"

He was interrupted by a peculiar whizzing and buzzing from a horn shaped brass instrument to his right. And he pressed a little button at one end, and instantly the room was filled with a booming voice. For the machine, which was a development of the Sight-Sound Relayer, performed the same functions as our telephone, except that one did not have to listen through a tube but could hear at a distance of many feet.

"The Timur! His Loftiness the Timur! I would speak with the Timur!" shouted the voice.

"Who is it?" called back Minister Zampum.

"It is I, Minister of Defense Hamur! Would you have my password?"

Several words, whose meaning Will could not recognize, were spoken; then the Timur raised his voice:

"What is it, Hamur? It is I, the Timur! Where are you? What do you want?"

"Important tidings, Your Loftiness! Important tidings! I am now at the front! I have received a message from Murkambu!"

The Timur's voice trembled just a little as he inquired:

"And what is the message, Hamur?"

"He wishes to arrange a conference, Your Loftiness. To sue for peace."

The assembled men stared at one another with significant smiles; several thankful sighs were heard.

"Peace is what we all want," replied the Timur. "But it must be on our own terms."

There was a brief pause before the voice of the invisible resumed,

"No, Your Loftiness, it must be on his terms."

Oaths and mutterings were heard throughout the room.

"What is that, Hamur?" demanded the ruler, in a voice of resentment. "Have you gone off to the enemy's side? If Murkambu sues for peace, why must we grant it on his terms?"

Another weighted pause ensued; and then the reply was heard, distinct and emphatic:

"Because, O Timur, there is a greater enemy than Murkambu at the doors. Because we must fight at his side to throw down a foe that threatens us all."

"But there is no foe beside Murkambu!"

"Indeed, there is, O Timur! Murkambu sues for peace not for fear of our warriors, but for fear of Blue Nitrolene. It spreads everywhere like a plague.

It eats away buildings, and undermines galleries, moving in ever wider circles. It menaces both sides alike. Ask Minister of Construction Zampum. Yes, ask him—and after that I will speak with you again.”

Gravely the Timur turned toward his Minister of Construction.

“What is this, Zampum, that you have been keeping from me?”

Zampum’s face turned a flaming red.

“There was no need to alarm you, O Timur, for we thought a remedy would be found. But it is truly as Hamur has said. Blue Nitrolene keeps spreading like a fire, and we do not know how to quench it. We fear it more than we do the enemy.”

A black scowl had lined the Timur’s face. Angrily he stalked toward Zampum.

“It is an evil thing,” he said, “that I have not been told. Come! I must see for myself! By my beard! If you keep any information from me now—”

With a hasty twist of his fingers, Zampum was adjusting the dials of the Sight-Sound relay. An instant later, the face of the Timur, as he looked and listened through the instrument, took on an expression of amazement, consternation, horror. For at least five minutes he remained at the machine, twitching slightly; then, in a snapping, decisive manner, he turned toward the horn-shaped brass contrivance.

“Hamur? Still there?” he demanded.

“Yes, Your Loftiness!”

“Then get into touch with Murkambu at once! Tell him that his terms are accepted!”

With a sigh, the Timur sank back; and, panting heavily, had to be supported by two of his followers.

Will meantime had hastily adjusted the Sight-Sound Relay to his eyes and ears, and had caught glimpses of smoking craters, wide as those of volcanoes, into which great buildings were collapsing, while from their flaming depths poured spouts of steam and immense twisting black wreaths of smoke. He saw the streets of a city crisscrossed with spreading fissures, from which thick yellow fumes were rising; and watched the submergence of a whole wide avenue, covered with trees and fountains, which sank with an ear-splitting roar into the blind depths, leaving only dust-clouds and ashes.

“There is indeed a greater enemy than Murkambu,” sighed the Timur, still breathing heavily. “We can have no further thought of fighting him now.”

Then, turning toward Will with a challenging blaze in his eyes, he demanded,

“You are the one to help us, Manu! You have introduced Blue Nitrolene! Now you must tell us the antidote!”

Ringed about by a circle of hostile faces, Will felt like a stag cornered by hounds. The Ministers, so tolerant and friendly only a few days before, now glared at him with bitter, angry eyes. And Will's heart sank, for he knew that he had no antidote for Blue Nitrolene; that never, in his experiments on earth, had it required an antidote, since it had burned itself out in time. So how would it be possible for him now, without long experimentation, to determine just what had gone wrong and how it could be remedied?

"Your Loftiness," he replied, "if you will give me but a few days—"

"A few days?" flung back the Timur, savagely. "In a few days, it may be too late!"

"I am sorry, Your Loftiness, but I know of no remedy—"

"Huh! I see it all now!" interrupted General Massupu, pointing a threatening finger at Will. "It is a plot! He was in the employ of Murkambu! It is a scheme to throw us down!"

Concurring murmurs and growls sounded from half a dozen throats.

"It's as clear as light—Fifth Tower penetration!" thundered Minister Zampum. "The miserable spy!"

Several of the ministers drew closer to Will, bristling, with steely flashing eyes, like wolves preparing to spring.

"Now, now, hold back there!" counselled the Timur, facing his followers sternly. "If the Manu was Murkambu's spy, how is it that his invention threatens our enemy as much as it does us?"

A brief silence greeted this question. But General Massupu was quick to reach the solution,

"Then he is a spy sent from the Upper Air to overthrow all Le-Mur! That is it! He is a spy from the Upper Air!"

Even the Timur gave a start at this accusation; and Will could see the growing enmity in the eyes of every one present.

"Why should I be a spy from the Upper Air?" he attempted to protest . . . when he was cut short by furious cries.

"Down with him! Throw him out! Take him away! To the Obliteration Rooms!"

It was with difficulty that the Timur quieted the disturbance. The ministers, forgetting their self-control, seemed bent upon finding a scapegoat. Their shaking fists, their contorted features, their malevolently shining eyes boded no good for Will as they stormed about him threateningly, while he glared at them in erect, defiant dignity.

"Come! Give the Manu a chance!" ordered the Timur; although his cool glittering glance showed that he too was by no means as friendly as of old. "We will let him seek an antidote for Blue Nitrolene. Surely, if he wishes,

he can unmake what he has made. So, I will once more open our laboratories to him."

"Largun-see," he went on, turning to his Minister of Chemistry, "you will conduct the Manu back to the Central Laboratory!"

And then to Will, as he started away in the company of Largun-See:

"Make haste, Manu! Remember, the safety of us all may depend upon it!"

From the grim, warning glances cast him by several of the ministers, Will knew that, regardless of the safety of Le-Mur as a whole, his own safety did assuredly depend upon the speed he made.

CHAPTER XII

TO THE BLACK TOWER

WILL'S eyes, as he bent over the blue vials on the laboratory table, were red and bloodshot. His lean form twisted and untwisted like a reed in the wind; his fingers twitched; low mutterings came from between his clenched teeth.

"God," he exclaimed, throwing down a test-tube so violently that it shattered, and spilt its sputtering contents over the green porcelain basin, "it's all no use! No use under heaven!"

In the reeling condition of his head, he hardly knew how long he had been laboring over the problem. Certainly, for more than two days, during which he had not had three hours of sleep. He was feeling crushed, smothered, like one who does battle with a sand-storm; he should have had months or even years to wrestle with the problem!

Sagging down upon a three-legged stool, he sat with his face buried in his hands; while from just beyond the barred doors a shout arose, followed by the angry mumbling of many voices, which rose and fell, and rose and fell, menacing, insistent, savage. The doors rocked and shook as threatening hands seized them from without, until the whole room seemed to tremble.

"There's no quieting them, Manu," said Largun-see, the Minister of Chemistry, as he came up to Will and tapped him gently on the shoulders. "I never would have believed it possible—our civilized Le-murians becoming so bloodthirsty!"

The voices from without had become louder and more articulate; at every entrance to the laboratory, a mob was clamoring.

"Give us the Manu! Down with the Manu, the Manu! Give us the spy, the traitor! Tear him to bits . . . The spy! . . . The Fifth Towerist! He has ruined our land!"

"Listen, Manu," counselled Largun-see, "better get out while there's still time. Over there to the left, just beyond the Radium Room, there is a trap-door in the floor—"

"Down with the Manu! Down with him! The traitor! The spy! The Fifth Towerist! Tear him to shreds!" clamored the voices, in an increasing din.

Will looked up apprehensively, but shook his head. "No, Largun-see, I'm not going to run—not while there's a ghost of a chance—"

"But the mob, Manu—it's made up of wild beasts. You don't know them. They're hungry for your blood. They blame everything on you—"

The doors were shaking until it seemed as if they could not hold out much longer.

"Manu—Manu—down with him! Grab him, catch him, crush him to hits!" thundered the rabble, while the blows of fists and heavy implements smashed against the barricades.

At the same time, an even more frightening phenomenon broke out. On the roof just above Will, a sudden bright patch had appeared, to the accompaniment of an ominous sizzling and hissing. Widening from a narrow focus, it spread out in a slowly expanding circle, radiating a furnace heat and giving forth clouds of smoke and steam through a freshly made opening in the roof. Will caught a glimpse of the Great Cavern, although, as he knew, this had been separated from the laboratory by more than ten feet of solid rock!

At his first glimpse of the glaring patch, Largun-see had given a gasp and a sigh. "By my robe! it's the end!" And, without another word, he rushed toward the trapdoor beyond the Radium Room.

Will, as he stared at the devouring fury in a sort of fascinated daze, realized that it was indeed the end. Within a few hours, Blue Nitrolene would have destroyed the laboratory!

Knowing that he had lost the battle; and knowing, also, that this meant the doom of Le-Mur, Will at first had scarcely the ambition to save himself. Why not go down amid the ruins of the world which he had unwittingly destroyed? At the doors of the laboratory, he could still hear those wild-beast cries, "Death to the Manu! Don't let the spy out! Grab the traitor! Pound him to bits!" But he scarcely cared if the mob broke in and seized him.

Then all at once—and he could not say just how this happened—it was as if a cry had come to him from a long distance. The face of Ilwanna framed itself before him; Ilwanna violet-eyed and auburn-baired as he had known her, but with her lovely features contorted with a look of terror and distracted pleading.

And suddenly, in some strong but irrational way, the conviction fastened

itself upon him that she might not be dead after all. The thought came to him that she might not only be alive, but in need of him; the idea that, if there were so much as one chance in ten thousand that she survived, it was a chance which he must not throw aside.

No! though the world were tumbling about his ears, he must seek her out, must learn the secret of her fate—and if, as he had long assumed, she was beyond his power to find, then he would be no worse off than now.

Just the faintest wisp of a new hope animated him as he hastened along the broiling laboratory, from whose ceiling pebbles and great rocks were beginning to fall. He passed the Radium Room; found the trapdoor, which Largun-see, in his haste, had left open; darted down the winding stairs; and closed the door behind him just as the mob, with a triumphant push, burst in at the further end of the room, with shouts of, "Catch the Manu! Beat him down! Pummel him! Kill him!"

By a circuitous route, through small winding side-tunnels, he made his way to the surface of the Great Cavern, where he paused in horror and consternation. What a change had come over the huge concrete columns which, shaped like inverted funnels, supported the roof! Bent as by an earthquake, some of them were horribly warped and twisted; others leaned like the famous tower at Pisa; one, with the hissing, seething furies eating away at it, had been severed at the base. And, in the roof, immense bulges had appeared, which seemed to the observer to deepen even as he watched. The marvel was that the roof had not already fallen!

Picking his way across the deep trenches and over heaps of refuse where here and there he could make out a still, man-sized form, Will hastened toward the quarters assigned him some time before by the Timur.

All was in confusion about him. Here and there some stray child ran crying, like a lost dog, looking for its parents; here and there some group of crazed refugees wandered, wailing and tearing at their hair. Old men tottered along on canes, their backs weighted down by burdens, looking for escape they knew not where; mothers trundled along with shrieking children, or fell fainting by the way, to rise and totter onward again; sturdy young men tried in vain to help their women as they struggled from the burning ruins of their homes, staggering on in search of a refuge, past other fugitives who staggered on in the opposite direction.

Blue Nitrolene was, apparently, doing its work thoroughly! To the west there was a continual line of flame; while the dull booming of explosions came time after time to Will's ears, and now and then the earth beneath him shuddered.

In their terror, most of the refugees hardly took any notice of Will; al-

though one or two paused to point with accusing fingers, or even to spit or curse. And there was one—a brawny, baleful-eyed man—who picked up rocks and hurled them in a shower which Will barely managed to escape.

“Death to the devil!” he cried. A mob arose at his heels and ran after Will; and he might not have been able to save himself had it not been for a timely fissure which opened up between them in the earth, with clouds of black vapor where Blue Nitrolene was spreading from an underground corridor.

Meanwhile the din had grown to ear-splitting proportions. A continuous dull booming, as of distant thunder, was varied by occasional roars and crashings as buildings sagged and tottered; by an incessant rumbling and jarring as great buildings collapsed; and by the shrill hissing and screeching of steam, as geysers broke out from the ground at the most unexpected points.

At the same time, a sweaty, humid heat possessed all things. Foul odors, as of decay, mingled with the deadly stench of escaping chemicals, whose noisome gasses irritated the nostrils and eyes; cinders swirled everywhere on a hot wind, and the smoke-clouds blackened everything.

It was, indeed, the latter fact that enabled Will to make good his escape, for his hands and face became covered with a sooty smear, which served to disguise him, and permitted him to mingle inconspicuously with the refugees, all of whom were likewise be-smudged.

Having with difficulty reached his rooms, Will found one of the flash-lights he had taken with him from the Upper Air; equipped himself with some compressed food, and water, and set out toward Murkambu’s mansion.

In a straight line, on the surface roads, the distance was not more than a few miles, but it seemed to Will that he struggled for hours through that seething, horror-stricken world. Once he almost slipped and lost his life in a deep crevice in the earth; a little later, he was threatened by a madman, who ran about in wild circles, swinging a club and howling menace at every passer-by; again, he had to go around a vast area in which a pit as deep as the Grand Canyon had opened, vomiting forth continual waves of yellow sulphurous vapors. At times he staggered, and felt ready to fall; at times his bloodshot eyes could scarcely make out the path ahead . . .

But always the vision of Ilwanna kept flashing before him, with her appealing, urgent eyes; and he knew that he must not give up until he had had word of her.

How much later it was he could not say, but at last he stood before Murkambu’s palace. The pale green and blue fountains had ceased to flow from their tinted bases. The pansies, which had grown as large as saucers, were trampled and broken; the ground was strewn with ash; ash covered the

walls of the bubble mansion, which, once glowing with a luminous pearly light, was now dull and lifeless of hue.

In the alabaster court, where Will had first seen Ilwanna by means of the Pellucid Depth Ray, a fountain of smoke and fire had sprung up; the busts of the venerable men and Venus-like women had fallen from their pedestals; the walls of the buildings, with their beautiful painted inscriptions, were dented and crumbling.

With a sigh, Will passed on to the main entrance of the palace. The door stood open; but all was dark and silent inside. The furniture was strewn about in confusion, bearing every sign of a hasty departure; but no servant walked those unlighted aisles, no guard stood at attention, no spear gleamed, no voice sounded. Will felt as if he had entered a tomb—all the more so when the thought of his beloved came to him, and he murmured, beneath his breath, “Ilwanna, where are you? Where are you?”

For many minutes he wandered through the courts and salons, his lungs choked with the vapors that were pouring in in ever-thickening streams. Was he not engaged on a mad quest? In his heart, he believed so—yet in his heart he knew he could not quit, not while the burning image of Ilwanna remained with him, her violet eyes beseeching, “Make haste, beloved, make haste!” . . .

At last, between two ash-scarred colonnades where blue hydrangeas had bloomed, he met an old, bent man who wandered witlessly to and fro and wore the drab yellow uniform of the servant class.

“The Upper Air devils,” he kept muttering to himself, in an incoherent, aimless manner, “the Upper Air devils have destroyed us!” and then, glancing at Will with eyes that spoke no recognition, “Is it not so, friend, the Upper Air devils have destroyed us!”

“Yes, the Upper Air devils!” agreed Will, to humor him.

The old man spat out in disgust, and was repeating his statement as if it were something new, when Will questioned him,

“Tell me, old father, do you know where Murkambu is?”

“Murkambu? Murkambu?” repeated the man, as if striving to grasp at an idea that eluded him. “He is gone, gone—they are all gone, gone! Run away from the Upper Air devils!”

“And Murkambu’s daughter, Ilwanna? Do you know where she is?” Will’s voice trembled as he put the question, but the old man merely went rambling on.

“The Upper Air devils—they have destroyed us, destroyed us!”

In his impatience, Will seized the old man, and shook the frail frame.

“Murkambu’s daughter—Murkambu’s daughter!” he repeated. “Ilwanna—Murkambu’s daughter—do you know where Ilwanna is?”

"Ilwanna? Ilwanna?" echoed the dotard, in a wailing, wandering voice. "Ilwanna? Ilwanna? The Upper Air devils have destroyed us—"

But Will shook his victim more energetically than ever, and at last a faint gleam came into the faded eyes.

"Ilwanna? Ilwanna? Was she not the fair one, the lovely elf—he whom the Leader locked in the Black Tower?"

"The Black Tower? Black Tower?" gasped Will. But by no amount of violence or urging could he extract any further information.

"The Upper Air devils," the man went on raving, "Upper Air devils have destroyed us—destroyed us!"

Yet even the fragment of information—incomplete and unsupported as it was—had come as a breath-taking revelation. For was it not possible that Ilwanna was alive after all? —alive although a prisoner in the Black Tower?

CHAPTER XIII

ORDEAL BY FIRE

THE Black Tower was well deserving of its name. Surrounded by a deep moat and high coal-black walls, it was draped in perpetual mourning as it stood on a low ridge of earth some distance back of Murkambu's home. A tall stone edifice, with only a few narrow light-slits in place of windows, it was known as a place where political offenders languished, sometimes for years, without a trial and without prospect of release.

But if ordinarily repulsive, it was doubly so now. The roof of the cavern was caving in above it in a hundred-foot bulge, shaped like a half orange. The ground about it was plowed up as by a gigantic dredge, and a crater that erupted jets of flaming liquid was widening in front of it, with connecting fissures that gave promise of devouring the entire edifice at almost any moment. And the heat, like that of a bake oven, blew over Will in searing breaths as he approached, and made him doubt if he would be able to reach it alive.

"God in heaven," he thought, "if there's anybody in there now, most likely he's cooked to a cinder!"

His lips were parched and cracking; his throat was dry; his limbs were burning in a fever-heat, but still he dragged his way on, around the crater with its spouts of blazing liquid, and toward the open main entrance of the Tower, from which the guards had evidently long departed.

As he passed through the gateway, he thought he could hear faint groans

from somewhere within; and feeble, broken cries. He paused for a moment; snatched the keeper's keys from a rack on a leaning wall; and started inside. As he did so, the floor shook with a lurch as of a speeding train rounding a curve; and Will was thrown from his feet. Recovering himself, he saw that a crack inches wide had opened in the ceiling; while the floor was still trembling.

Guided only by his flashlight, he started along the dark aisle, which wound sharply, so narrow as barely to permit his passage. On either side were small iron doors, to some of which he applied his keys. But the first of them to open showed an empty room; the second let out a cloud of nauseous vapors, from which he had to flee precipitately; and the third revealed a lean, silent, grimly unresponsive form.

"Too late! Am I too late?" he wondered, as his keys slid into the lock of the fourth door. An instant later, an emaciated figure with streaming white hair came tottering toward him.

"Forgotten! All, all forgotten!" he thought he heard this bony apparition mourning, in a voice reminding him of a gibbering shade. Then, with his hands clutched over his breast, the figure reeled and fell; while a crash as of exploding dynamite thudded upon Will's ears, and the entire building shook.

Knowing the poor sufferer to be beyond his aid, he wandered on. In fast waning hope, he pounded on each door as he passed, calling out fearfully, automatically,

"Ilwanna! Ilwanna!"

But the echoes of his own voice came back to mock him along those twisted aisles.

"Ilwanna! Ilwanna!"

His head swayed in delirium; he gasped and coughed as the hot vapors choked his lungs; and once or twice he fell on a dark stairway. Surely, the one he sought was not to be found here!

But still he raised his cry, more feebly now,

"Ilwanna! Ilwanna, Ilwanna!" Was it only that he imagined that at last there came an answering call? What was that voice, thin, remote, unreal,

"Will, Will, Will?" Surely, his fevered mind was playing him tricks. But was not the sound repeated, "Will, Will! . . . This way, Will! . . . Here, here, here!" No! It must all be a cruel delusion!

Then suddenly his brain had regained its clarity. Suddenly his senses were alert, active. The sound—he knew now that it was not mere imagination!—came from above him, from beyond a twisted flight of stairs. Perhaps it was but the voice of a madman mocking him—still, did it not have a familiar ring?

Up the stairs he dashed, though there came a jolt that seemed almost to shake the building off its foundations. Beyond a barred door he paused, while his fingers fumbled with the keys. For a moment he could not find any to fit the lock; while from outside there rang a series of thunderous detonations that drowned out the voice from within.

Then the key was turning in its socket; the door swung open; and toward him, with a swooning movement, there sagged a figure which he half recognized, and yet did not recognize, so distraught was she.

"Ilwanna!" he cried; and clasped her even as she was falling to the stone floor.

It was not until much later that he learned her story: how she had been knocked unconscious yet had escaped serious injury in the second rock-slide in the tunnel, which had finally separated her from Will; how she had been taken by Murkambu's men to the palace of her father, who had seen through her disguise and in his rage had sentenced her to the Black Tower; how she had been forgotten there, when her father and all his retainers had taken flight, owing to the devastation of Blue Nitrolene; but how, having been provided with more food and better accommodations than ordinary prisoners, she had managed to survive, though she was now at the end of her resources.

Her beautiful cheeks smeared with dirt, her eyes burning and tear-red-dened, her lovely hair hanging wildly and disorderly over her face, her limbs shaking with weariness, she looked little more than the ghost of her former self—although after a little time, with rest and food, she would become once more the old radiant Ilwanna.

So, at last, Will thought as he held her, clinging and weeping, in his arms. But only for a few seconds could they remain clasped together.

As if to prove this no time for love making, the house gave another spasmodic heave; while through the narrow slit of the window they could see hungry red tongues of flame reaching toward the cavern roof.

"Come!" Will murmured; and half led, half supported her down the twisted stairway, and into the glaring outer world. He was astonished to note how the erupting crater, with its flaming liquid jets, had widened during his short stay in the tower. Well for him that he had left the building! For, not five minutes after his escape, there came a roar as if the heavens were crashing; a mountain of crimson light jutted upward, with cascades of scattering sparks; and the entire tower, falling like a child's castle, was lost in the crater's fuming abysses.

But Will and Ilwanna had hardly time to look back at the dread spectacle. Though their heads ached and their fagged limbs rebelled, somehow, they

forced their way onward—onward toward the Golden Range, where Will had entered Le-Mur, and where he hoped to find the cave entrance that led back toward the Upper Air.

How they managed to reach this haven, after hours of tormented struggling, was more than he was ever able to explain. Everywhere they saw refugees groaning, or lying crushed by fallen stones; everywhere they saw the fissures in the ground widening, flame, smoke and steam pouring forth more voluminously. Yet finally they stood before the narrow tunnel in the earth, which, almost choked with rocks where Will had blasted his way out, showed a dark crevice barely wide enough to permit a man to wriggle through.

“The way back to the Upper Air . . . if we can make it,” murmured Will. “Are you willing to come with me, Ilwanna?”

“I am willing to go to the world’s end with you, beloved.”

As they stood looking back across the Great Cavern from the height of the Golden Range, they saw nothing but a waste of flame and cinders—a landscape dotted with steaming geysers, smoking craters, roofless buildings with their shattered interiors flung about like the entrails of slaughtered monsters.

Through the thickening smoke-clouds, a line of bloody red was spreading all about them; the roof-supporting columns were bent at every angle; waves seethed and rolled and noxious vapors poured where hills and valleys had been; while, with a low rumbling, the very roof began to tremble, and crash.

“Quick, for God’s sake! It’s the end, the end!” groaned Will. And, forcing Ilwanna ahead of him, he helped and pushed her through the little black crevice into the cave.

Even as he did so, they were stunned by a deafening roar, which pitched them both forward to the earth. And, while the reverberations still rang in their ears, they stared into a sudden blackness. The lights of Le-Mur had gone out!

As they began creeping through the cave, by the rays of Will’s flashlight, a long-blended wail as of myriads of terrorized men and women reached them from the depths of the doomed world.

* * *

Three days later a party of scientists, exploring one of the limestone caverns that threaded the Whitley Range, came across two persons whom at first they took for dead—a man and a woman clasped in one another’s arms, who appeared to have perished of hunger or exhaustion. It was only by degrees that they managed to revive the unconscious victims, who for days

lingered near the dread border-line, before at last, thanks to the best of attention, they were restored to life and health.

The reader will, of course, recall the national sensation that was caused when it was found that the man was none other than Will Claybrook, the missing inventor; while the woman, who became his wife as soon as they were able to go through the ceremony, was reported to be a daughter of ancient Le-Mur.

Following his return, Will was a changed man. He no longer gave himself whole-heartedly to science; instead, he concentrated on a book on "The Life and Customs of the Le-Murians," which, he said, would occupy him for years. But there was a grimness about him, as of a man returned from the other side of the grave. I remember how, one evening when I paid him a visit, he was staring as of old through the eyepiece of the Pellucid Depth Ray; while at his side, shiningly beautiful and statelier than ever, stood the very person whom he had once delighted to observe through the same machine.

"See, Tom," he said, motioning to the eyepiece, "all that is left of Le-Mur!"

I looked; and before my eyes there spread the enormous reaches of the Great Cavern, the roof in places fallen, and mile-deep abysses scooped out where the floor had once been. From the depths, fuming vapors arose in sultry clouds, illuminated by the dull-red light of smoldering fires; but nowhere could I see even the tatters of a building, even a sign that human life had ever inhabited these voids.

"At last Blue Nitrolene burns itself out!" He stated, solemnly. "A few days more, and the Depth Ray will show us—blackness"

Then with a growl, he raised an iron rod in the air and swung it as if to demolish the machine,

"Curses on the Depth Ray—which brought the doom of a world!"

"A world that would have brought its own doom, being rotten at the core!" exclaimed Ilwanna, leaping forward and restraining her husband's hand. "Remember also, Will, without the Depth Ray, we would not be together now!"

"Which is worth more to me than all Le-Mur!" he said.

As his hand reached out for hers and they stood smiling at one another, I knew he had indeed spoken the truth.

THE END

THE FAR DETOUR

By Arthur J. Burks

There, in what seemed solid rock, Gregg Pettis saw the figures of a man and a woman beckoning him. But that shock was as nothing compared to his amazement when he found himself drawn through the bore of the undersea tunnel to the City of the Golden Gate and found—Atlantis!



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE DAWN

WE WERE eight hundred miles out from New York and ten miles down, when the Giant Mole developed its weird eccentricity. The Giant Mole was an invention of Rogers McLeod, chief engineer of the sub-Atlantic Bore, built for this very purpose. There was just one other like it in the world; it was driving out from France to meet us. I had been with the super-sandhogs for four months at the time and considered myself one of them—and proudly, too—though I was a graduate engineer and didn't do their sort of work. I had started as boss of twelve men, operating twelve of the huge drills by which the Bore was reinforced and had graduated to being in charge of three sub-engineers, each of whom supervised twelve men.



Eight hundred miles out, ten miles down! The dream of one man, who had believed in it so completely he had talked millionaires and governments into helping him put it through. I have no words to express the feeling it gave me to be honored by getting a job with fifty-year-old Rogers McLeod. In those four months I had come to regard him as a father. He had grown to like me, though he wasn't one to show favoritism.

"Not many college graduates, wet behind the ears, get a break like this, Gregg Pettis," he told me grumpily when he took me on. "It's a chance to write your name in the book of immortals—if you live through it."

"I'll live through it," I said, drawing up to my six feet of brawny height and, I trusted, getting just the right shine of exaltation in my eyes. He had done amazing things. In just a decade after the last tunnel had been driven under the East River, New York, he had driven eight hundred miles of Sub-Atlantic Tunnel without the loss of a man, except through natural causes. Men had fallen sick on the job and died back in the city—of broken hearts, I often thought, because they couldn't stick with the Giant Mole.

What a piece of machinery that was! It actually fitted its name, as it growled and rumbled and burrowed through the tough strata of ten miles down. It was difficult to realize that ten miles of rock and water were over our heads, so certainly did that Mole go about its business.

The super-sandhogs worked inside the Mole. They looked like any other sandhogs; most of them had spent their lives tunneling under rivers. McLeod had taken his pick of the best: hard-working, hard-swearing, fearless men of the tubes. Not one of them but would at McLeod's command gone out in front of the Mole and allowed himself to be macerated by the bitt. That's how they believed in their boss. That's how I believed in him, too. To Rogers McLeod nothing was impossible.

Therefore it isn't hard to understand how the boys felt when they knew he was troubled. The Giant Mole was suddenly traveling a faintly eccentric route—when the world knew that in order for the advancing crews to make contact in mid-ocean, there couldn't be so much as an error of a hairs-breadth. At this distance such an error, extended to the middle of the Atlantic, would have made us miss one another by an equivalent of the distance between New York City and Philadelphia.

"Toughen her up!" shouted McLeod. "Then we'll go back and stop, and see what's wrong up ahead!"

It was when he issued that command, after the Giant Mole had advanced her two-hundred-foot length through the sub-strata of rock, that one saw the super-sandhogs justify their name. Out through the thick, hard wall of the tubular Giant Mole, through slots provided—much like torpedo tubes

on warships, though much smaller—the crews jammed their drills, smashing them home with compressed air, exerting pressure beyond that ever used by man on any other work. One hundred and fifty feet the drills—segments added on as they bit into the solid rock—drove into the walls of the Bore, in every direction save ahead and behind.

ROGERS McLEOD had taken one leaf from the book of engineers who had completed the Grand Coulee Dam, and this was it. When our crews had fashioned a network of holes beyond the walls of the Bore—walls held in place by the body of the Giant Mole itself—Xment, a cement ten times the hardness of the ordinary variety, was blasted into the holes, and under that terrific pressure “tamped” in so firmly that it oozed into interstices in the seemingly solid granite.

The usual practice, after this had been done, was to withdraw the boring and cementing apparatus, drive on the length of the Giant Mole, then send crews out behind it to do the job of shoring. When this happened, not only was Rogers McLeod a god, but so was each and every one of the naked-to-the-waist, sweating sandhogs. One never knew what might happen. Remember how a “boil” under the East River, hurled whole crews up to the surface, where some of them died of “bends” before they could be reached by rescue boats? Well, imagine what would happen if a “boil” developed ten miles down! None had, so far, but who could possibly tell? We might, at any moment, drive through into a “deep” and—but not even Rogers McLeod would say what would happen then. Perhaps the Giant Mole would be smashed with everybody in it. Maybe Mole and men would be hurled to the surface of the sea, there to explode into fragments like deep-sea fishes brought to the top. In any case, the Bore would be flooded—and who could even dream of pumping out the Atlantic Ocean?

Yes, we had plenty of things to worry about, when the Giant Mole began to develop that eccentric movement ahead. No telling what we were running into. And when we backed off, and flashed great lights ahead of us, we could tell little or nothing. Something was wrong, but what it was could not be told from within the Mole, and it was a settled rule of McLeod’s that no man should go outside. We might be running into a volcano. The heat out there might be beyond human endurance, whatever the precautions we might take. Heaven knew it was sometimes unbearable within where every conceivable invention for the safety of human beings had been installed.

I’ll give just one hint of the power of the Mole. The material displaced by it was not carried back through the Bore to New York. It was forced in all directions, into the walls of the Bore itself—so that for ordinary purposes

the very material displaced would have sufficiently shored the Bore. The Bore was a hundred feet in diameter, the floor of it flat, and wide enough for the passing of the cars that were to run on it when it was done.

Navigational instruments more nearly exact than those used on passenger-carrying airplanes had been developed for this one job. They were installed inside the Mole. The panel where they were read was the direct responsibility of McLeod himself. He wouldn't allow anybody else to take over—though he did teach me about them.

The Mole was, of course, exactly the size and shape of the Bore. The idea was that this Mole and the one advancing to meet us should come into contact as exactly as though attracted magnetically.

And things were going wrong!

Would the seven years of record-breaking safety-margin be broken? Was something due to happen now that would cost lives, perhaps thwart the completion of the tunnel? McLeod hadn't believed it possible. Oceanographers had checked the entire route before work began, given him minute information on formations below the Atlantic's floor. There should be no slip-ups, he had left nothing to chance.

Yet something was plainly wrong.

WE finished our cementing job, backed the Mole its length, shut down all machinery except that which provided us with oxygen and light. Then McLeod called us all together.

"I don't know what's ahead," he said grimly. "The Atlantic may be in on us in a minute. I don't know of any place where it's ten miles deep, but our oceanographers may have missed a few holes in it. I simply don't know what's wrong! I've checked the Mole from stem to stern, and it's in perfect condition. Therefore what has to be wrong is outside somewhere, ahead. I'm going out to see what it is!"

We all raised a row at this. If there were danger, McLeod must not face it. If something happened to him there was no one to take his place. Sandhogs could be spared, but they didn't have geological knowledge necessary to the task. There were other assistant engineers, some of them college graduates like myself, some of them grizzled veterans. Any one of us might have done it.

McLeod asked for volunteers and my voice quivered, I can tell you, when I said:

"I'm an orphan and a bachelor. I'll take a chance."

"It's my job," said McLeod. "I can't ask anybody to do it."

He knew it was useless, for we insisted that he telephone his backers in New York for instructions, and they had answered:

"Risk all lives but your own, if it seems necessary. You are forbidden to take personal risk."

All of which added up to this: that even McLeod, for the first time, was afraid that death might lie ahead of the Giant Mole. A sub-sea volcano? None was indicated here, but that didn't prove there wasn't one. Our charts on this area indicated nothing harmful. We were even down under a sort of "dome," where the floor of the ocean bulged toward the surface. It should have been harder, sounder, than any formation we had struck.

But there was a touch of softness in it somewhere . . .

"The Mole behaves," said McLeod, "as though some of the stuff ahead were honeycombed—which just isn't possible! It acts like a bit being screwed into a crooked hole."

And yet, when we looked ahead of the huge bit—composed of great masses of molybdenum—we could see nothing. Not even when we examined it through our special microscopes, which brought the facing to us almost as closely as the eye could have been pressed to it, could we see what was wrong.

The only thing left to do was go out. And I had volunteered.

THEY let me out through an aperture in the bottom of the bit, about twenty feet from the end. The first time this aperture had ever been opened for a man to pass through, since work had started on the Bore. McLeod had sworn it would never be used.

But it had to be used.

They toggled me out as though I were being rocketed to some planet where atmospheric conditions, pressure and the like, were beyond the endurance of earthmen. They gave into my hand the special light which also had not yet been used in the Bore. It was a light-novelty, that thing. It cast a circle of blue light against an object, and, when one were close behind the light—and the obstacle were within a foot of it—it was possible to see several feet into the mass—in this instance solid granite.

I had a strange feeling when I stepped out ahead of the Mole, the first man ever to set foot on this bit of stone. I was *sure* of that. After all, it was several miles below the bottom of the sea, I certainly had a right to think so.

The lights inside the Mole were turned off, so that I could make the fullest use of my X-Ray lamp for a thorough examination of the facing. McLeod told me that the formation which was causing the trouble reached no higher than I would be able to see with the light. I was to come back with a complete report.

All right, listen!

I walked up to the facing, turned on the Y-Ray light. I looked into the stone for a distance of perhaps six feet . . .

And was quite convinced that I was insane! Deep within the stone I saw a man, and a woman! Some trick of reflection, of course. Or else my equipment was defective, and the atmosphere and pressure were playing peculiar tricks on my eyes. But I studied them more closely, and I could still see them. Moreover, they were moving, beckoning to me. The man smiled slightly.

I was being urged to walk into six feet of granite. It required all the force and drive and power of the Giant Mole to do that, actually.

Next instant, I knew it was a weird hallucination, for the apparitions were gone. I backed up, playing the light around a bit, studying the stratification, my heart hammering with excitement. Here was something I'd never dare tell anyone, or my report on the formation would certainly not be acceptable. Great engineers didn't take the word of lunatics!

I moved up to the facing again, *and not until I had walked straight into it, did I realize that I had obeyed a summons!* I felt no contact with the granite, no impediment to my walking. At first I thought I must have been mistaken in the distance I had withdrawn from the facing.

But then I realized that the shape of the Bore had changed. Instead of being round, save for the bottom, it was now some forty feet in height, five feet across, and some seventy feet deep. Moreover, my Y-ray wasn't responsible for the blinding light—as of midday in the tropics—which suddenly bathed me.

I had walked into some fourth dimensional pocket in the granite. I didn't wait for any explanation. I whirled and started back. But there was no way back. It was closed off, completely, by solid granite; I could see no Giant Mole anywhere.

By some strange circumstance I had been imprisoned in a vast vault, ten miles below the surface of the Atlantic. Had my friends been watching me they would have seemed to see me walk into the facing and disappear!

Invisible tentacles seemed to grasp all over my body, lift me through the air with breath-taking speed—into an area of even more blinding light.

I blinked my eyes, and saw again the man and the woman, and knew that they were real!

The tall man bowed to me slightly, said something in a language that had a vaguely familiar ring—but only because I had made a study of dead languages in school! It was all of a minute before my mind grasped that the language was ancient Greek, and that what the man said was:

“Welcome to the City of the Golden Gate!”

CHAPTER II

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE

WHATEVER the “City of the Golden Gate” was, it was obvious that it had nothing to do with the Golden Gate known to all the world, out in California. That was over three thousand miles away, nearer to four thousand. And it wasn’t below the surface of the ocean.

Nor did I see anything at first to justify calling this a “city.” It was just a room, occupied by myself and two strangers, a man and a woman. The man towered above me. The woman was about five feet eight inches tall. The man was of majestic appearance, white, with black hair and blue eyes. He looked as if he could have squeezed me to a pulp with one hand. The woman had green eyes and red hair, and looked every inch a queen.

While we were trying to find a method of communication, I looked that room over. That’s all it was, a room. It was apparently covered, walls and ceiling, by some radioactive material which supplied the light and looked like frosted gold. It was oblong, from east to west. But the northwest and northeast corners—I was sure of my directions, strangely—had doors set in them, at odd angles. No matter what my disappearance might mean to McLeod and his super-sandhogs, I would find out what lay beyond those doors before I even thought of going back.

The south wall was not entirely covered by the frosted-gold material, I noted a bit later. It was covered by a painting, of two life-size people, a man and a woman. The briefest glance told me that the pictures, though none too good as likenesses, were those of the man and woman who had so strangely met me. But the man answered my unspoken question by saying slowly, so that I could understand:

“The forebears of Sitnalta and me, who saved from destruction the City of the Golden Gate!”

Sitnalta, I gathered, was the woman. And shortly thereafter she addressed the man as Naeco.

I decided I’d better start off by asking questions, if I could make myself understood. I said:

“How did I get here? How were you able to bring me?”

“We have known,” said the man haltingly, “for four months that your group from Outside was approaching the foundations of our city. We have known that *for the first time in twelve thousand years* we were certain to be brought into contact with the peoples Beyond! So we made our plans. We would gain possession of one of you, at a given time, study you, and if you passed certain tests, we would welcome the contact . . .”

"But if I did not pass?" I asked.

"I was not speaking of you personally, but of any one of your men," said Naeco. "If you do not pass the tests, then we shall make sure that no contact is ever made."

He said it quite calmly, but there was something in his eyes, something in the cold intonations of his voice, which gave me a hint of the truth. In some manner these two people could work all the havoc with the Giant Mole that McLeod had feared when he had sent me out to look at the facing. Certainly, people who could "kidnap" me as I had been kidnapped, could do what they wished with the Mole and everybody in it. McLeod and those super-sand-hogs were at the mercy of this man and this woman. And what those two did about it, seemed to depend on me. "Tests" had been mentioned. But *what* tests? And why?

"How far above my people am I?" I asked, choking.

Naeco tried in every conceivable way to indicate the distance, without success. But I somehow got the idea that in a matter of seconds I had been whisked up through two miles of rock formation. I dropped the question of distance to ask:

"How was it done?"

"Our scientists," said Naeco, while Sitnalta smiled slightly, "have done much experimenting with the substrata. Besides, we've known for a long time that you were coming, and a shaft was simply driven down to intercept your course! We controlled the shaft from our laboratory nearby. This room is part of the laboratory. We have since closed the shaft, until we have decided what to do about you and your people."

For four months they had known of our coming. How? I asked that, too, and Naeco, bored with the question, obviously, answered as he would a troublesome, question-asking child.

"We have scientific instruments for tracing disturbances of the earth. Your machine is becoming more and more a disturbing element!"

Listening devices! I could understand those. We had them for use in war, for testing depths in the ocean. Also, we had the seismograph, for testing earth tremors, and locating the center of disturbance. Remembering the vibration when all our drills were boring into the walls of the Tunnel, I could understand how it had been done. I rather doubted if our seismographs would have picked up the vibrations of the Giant Mole, tho'; these people had something!

"What of my people down there," I asked next, "while these tests you mention are going on?"

"They are being tested, too," said Naeco. "You have, to them, vanished

without trace, without explanation. That fact will have a certain effect on your master and the rest of his men. If they have the courage, the belief in themselves, to go ahead with their work—there is nothing to stop them except us, when and if we decide to do so. But if terror causes them to give over working, then they lack what people must have if we are to associate with them.”

I could, without difficulty, put myself in McLeod’s place. Probably he hadn’t even yet missed me. Waiting for me to come back, signal from outside the Mole, be taken in to make my report. He would grant me an hour, perhaps. Then, he would investigate. He would throw the great light from the Mole into the facing. And I would be gone. I could see his face, a mask of unbelief. I could hear the superstitious murmurs of the men—and sandhogs, even super-sandhogs, have their superstitions.

They would, finally, send someone else into the facing, and find nothing. Then . . .

But I knew McLeod. In spite of anything he would hammer away at his job . . .

“There is now no difference in the formation to effect the behavior of your machine,” said Naeco. “The shaft has been filled; is exactly as it was when there was no shaft at all.”

McLeod would discover that, of course, and go right ahead. But he and his men would expect almost anything to happen. And down there, ten miles under, with a mysterious terror hanging over them, human beings might do anything. And they would think and feel plenty. McLeod, from this moment on, would have his hands full.

If there were some way I could contact him, warn him back, until I should have passed the “tests” hinted at; but then, if he had gone, he and his men would have failed to pass the tests which, I gathered, would have been just as bad as it would be if I failed. It wasn’t just me they were going to test, but my people, through me. I had, by chance, been chosen a representative of my people. I didn’t care for the honor. No telling what might be done to me.

I thought of hanging one on Naeco’s chin, and then running out through one of those doors. But what good would it have done? Nothing in our science could have sunk that shaft, then filled it up again in the blinking of an eye, as these people of the City of the Golden Gate had done. They probably had other powers. But one thing I promised myself. I’d try my luck with this Naeco before I was finished, if for no other reason than what he was calmly planning to do to McLeod and the super-sandhogs.

That he could, calmly and easily, let the Atlantic into the Bore, I knew without being told. So, I’d better behave myself.

“All right, Naeco,” I said. “You’ve got me. What’s next?”

THE two conferred, across the oblong room from me, while I looked them over. I might as well describe them, though I’ve already told more than any normal person would believe.

The man wore a robe of emerald green, banded and embroidered with gold, over a tunic which looked like spun gold. When his robe was thrown back to give his arms free play, I noted that a “sun” of stones which looked to be diamonds, sapphires and rubies, was embroidered on his chest. A regal or priestly garment, I didn’t know which.

The woman had the same sort of outfit, except that she wore a dress in place of a tunic, and carried a sphere, about eight inches in diameter, in her left hand, a sort of scepter in her right.

Both man and woman wore purple satin hose and sandals with up-tilted toes. The sandals shone as though they were afire. There seemed to be flecks of gold in them.

I must confess that I liked the looks of the woman, and I didn’t like the man. Maybe I didn’t like the man because I had a sneaking suspicion that he could whip me easily. Now Naeco turned to me.

“My sister and I,” he said, “have decided that you might as well begin. But first, tell us something about yourself. What your knowledge is, for example. And your name . . .”

“My name is Gregg Pettis,” I began, repeating it until both had got it. “I am an engineer. I have a good grounding in ancient languages . . .”

From there I went on to tell about myself. Now and again Naeco interrupted to ask questions, which I answered reluctantly. Now and again Sitnaltá asked something, and I answered with enthusiasm. There was almost the crooning of the sea in her voice. That’s it, her voice made me think of the whispering of a sea-shell, held to the ear. It was all very weird, and I was far from accepting, even yet, that all this I believed to be happening, actually was.

I wouldn’t have been surprised—indeed, I’d have been relieved! —to regain consciousness inside the Giant Mole, see McLeod bending over me, hear him say,

“You sure gave us a fright, lad. You passed out and we had to bring you in. We almost didn’t get you in time.”

But then, it *had* happened. There was absolutely no chance of a mistake about that. And what now was Naeco saying?

“You are reasonably well informed, for not being one of our people, so we are of the opinion that you may be representative of your own. At least you’ll have to do.”

He didn't sound enthusiastic about me. But then I suppose I was just as strange to him as he was to me.

"I warn you," said Naeco, "that any attempt to resist us will mean your instant death—provided you escape death in your tests!"

Just what, in Heaven's name, were the tests going to be? Was I going to have to run some strange gauntlet, meet queer knights in the lists, fight duels, face wild animals in some undersea arena?

I was on the bottom of the sea, or below it, and I was quite comfortable in that I was neither too hot nor too cold, could breathe easily. There was an exhilaration in the atmosphere of this room that was pouring through my blood like good wine. And it wasn't just because of the woman, either. She was, I judged, somewhere between twenty and twenty-four. The man was in his middle thirties, judged by standards I knew. I might be wrong, of course. Since they lived below the sea, they must have mastered many problems. They might be a thousand years old, each of them, for all I knew, and if they had said as much, then and there, I'd have accepted it as being quite in keeping.

"I'll play your game," I told Naeco. "I didn't ask for this, and I don't seem to have any choice. But don't try to manhandle me!"

His lips twitched slightly in a hint of a smile, and it almost made me forget myself. Yes, he could handle me easily; he knew it, and knew that I knew it. He was simply amused at my cockiness.

What the woman thought of me I had no idea. I looked into the depths of those green eyes of hers several times and could get no slightest hint. Nor did she offer protest, or seem shocked, when Naeco threatened me with death if I weren't a good boy from now on. She was probably just as feral as her brother.

"Well," I said, "let's go, if you've asked all the questions you want to."

"There will be many questions," said Naeco, "but they can be asked as we progress in our examination of you. Naturally, we are interested in your civilization, if you have any. We're interested in the details of your burrowing machine, though it is, naturally, inferior to our mechanical instruments . . ."

IASKED Naeco whether, if I failed, our people would get another chance, whether someone else might be "kidnapped" in the same manner for testing. He refused to answer directly.

"If you fail," he said, "you will be beyond being interested in what we do afterwards!"

Were they *never* going to take me through one of those doors, into this City of the Golden Gate? I was tired of impossible mysteries. If I were go-

ing to be pushed around, I wanted to get it over with. I was curious about whether I could measure up to what was expected of me—and resolved that this guy would never hear me cry “Uncle” no matter what.

One thing got me: the scepter that woman carried in her right hand. It had a golden ball on the end of it, which looked like a tiny sun. If these people were sun-worshippers, and behaved like other sun-worshippers I’d read about, they might offer me up as a sacrifice, taking my heart out and holding it in front of my glazing eyes while I could still see it. The Aztecs had done things like this.

But how, under the ocean, could they be sun-worshippers? They couldn’t see the sun. But then, they couldn’t exist under the ocean, either! It was time I found out about things.

Naeco and Sitnalta seemed to think so, too. He walked to one of those doors, with stately tread, opened it, stood aside for Sitnalta to go through ahead of him.

We exited from that room into a city gorgeous beyond anything I had ever seen. It was lighted by what seemed to be a vast system of pylons, each one topped by its own individual blazing sun. Each pylon was a huge replica of the scepter Sitnalta carried. Those orbs atop the pylons not only supplied light, but an even, temperate heat.

I gasped as the City of the Golden Gate smote me in the eye. I saw Naeco pleased for the first time, knew that he loved this city beyond even his love for his beautiful sister. He stood aside, to the right, his sister to the left, and they did not forbid me to stand between them to catch my first glimpse.

“A marvel of beauty!” I whispered, wishing I had poetic words to describe what I saw. “Gorgeous as a dream. Fragile as mist in the morning. It is truly a fairyland. Fabled Atlantis could never have been so lovely!”

“Atlantis is no fable,” said Naeco. “And it not only could have been as lovely, but was, *and is!*”

I whirled, staring at Naeco, then at Sitnalta.

Oh, I suppose I should have guessed before now, but I hadn’t.

“*And is . . .*” Naeco had just said. Now he went on, “and you are the first from outside to look again upon her beauty, *after twelve thousand years!*”

My first glimpse of the City of the Golden Gate was . . .

My first glimpse of Atlantis!

CHAPTER III

BEAUTY UNBEARABLE

HERE was the land of which poets had written for ages, of which bards had sung, about which many tales had been told. This was fabulous Atlantis, no longer a fable but truth. Here was the land of sun worshippers, wherein lived people whose civilization had been superior to ours twelve thousand years ago, when a vast continent between Central America and Europe had sunk beneath the waves; the land of which it had been written that “even in those days, men flew in machines of their own building,” in which there was a system of lighting more advanced and mysterious than electric light. Here was the land which had been the dwelling place of “men like gods,” who had even come to regard themselves as gods. . .

So that, according to some tales, Diety had drowned most of it beneath the waves. Some even said that this land had been called En-Don at one time, which is to say, Eden. And I had re-discovered it!

The desire to go out into the City of the Golden Gate was almost unbearable. I wanted to snatch off the equipment which I had worn into the facing, to give my body freedom, that I might travel fast and far through all the beauty which lay before me. I looked up, and saw what looked to be the dome of the sky. But before I could ask about it, Naeco said,

“A simple feat of engineering, Pettis. The forebears of Sitnalta and me worked it out. A matter of stresses and strains, properly distributed. What you see is the floor of the ocean, through the dome our forebears built to hold off the sea, when it was known five hundred years in advance that Atlantis must sink.”

“But how could they have known just where, and in what shape the City of the Golden Gate would sink?” I asked, breathless with amazement.

“Do not the people of your world,” said Naeco disdainfully, “know where faults in the earth lie? Can they not even do such a thing as predict earth tremors, and say exactly where they will occur?”

“Yes. Yes, of course.”

“So can we. We have always been able to. We knew exactly how the land hereabouts would settle, how deeply, and what the nature and shape of the terrain would be when it was done—and we erected the dome so that it would fit. It was flexible, of course, from the beginning, so that there should be no way by which the sea could enter at any place.”

Breathless, I asked for no more at the moment. I tried my best to keep Naeco, already insufferably superior, from seeing my amazement. I was already thinking of the words wherewith to tell my world of this when I had

passed all tests and been returned to my own land, down in the Bore—to travel thence to New York and give the story to the earth above the seas.

Now Naeco gave a signal to someone I did not see, and a strange thing happened. A huge ball that looked to be of glass, with facets like a diamond, brilliantly reflecting the light of the nearest “sun,” rolled up to us from around a corner. It rolled in silence. I could look through to the interior, and see that it was fitted out for human occupancy. There were chairs, a half dozen of them, which swung easily with the rolling movement of the ball so that they were always upright, no matter how the ball rolled.

It came to a stop in front of us. I could see no slot through which it must be running. I could not figure out how it was controlled, except that Sitnalta made a slight movement with the “scepter” in her hand, as though she were drawing the ball to her. And when it stopped, a door fitting snugly into its side opened. Sitnalta stepped inside, followed by Naeco, then by myself. They seated themselves. Sitnalta signaled for me to sit near her. Naeco opened his mouth as though to protest, then closed it tightly when Sitnalta frowned slightly at him. I gathered instantly that she was the stronger of the two, that her huge brother was subservient to her.

The ball began to roll. We were going into the heart of the City of the Golden Gate.

But I was mistaken about that, for suddenly the ball rose easily, silently, into the air. Then it was that I noticed a system of slender metal beams above our heads, inside the globe. They looked like chilled steel rods. I could not see how the ball was levitated, nor understand by what power it was propelled. I looked a question at Naeco.

“A cosmic force of which we are the masters,” he said. “Those tall masts you see, scattered through the City of the Golden Gate . . .” I hadn’t seen them until he pointed one out, and I noted a slender needle-like shaft easily twice the height of the Empire State Building; there were many of them, scattered at varying intervals throughout the City, and all of them projecting above the highest building, “are our control towers. The power emanates from them, in waves. It passes through the tubing over our heads. The aero-sphere is thus borne aloft as though an invisible wire were passing through one of the tubes inside the sphere.”

“I know,” I said grimly. “In my country we call it riding the beam. We have control towers, too . . .”

“And when I wish to change direction,” said Naeco, as though what I said mattered not at all, “all I have to do is press one of these buttons. There is a button representing each of our control towers; when I press a certain button, we travel toward that control tower.”

"Like a spider on his web," I said, "except that your web is invisible."

"I do not understand what you mean by spider." He didn't like to admit that I knew anything he didn't, I could see that. But I had no wish to crow over the man. I was too happy in what I was seeing. For now, some six or seven hundred feet below us, I could see the mosaic of the City of the Golden Gate, unfolding. A city of straight, narrow streets, bordered by trees of which I hadn't the slightest knowledge. Between the streets and the buildings were sidewalks, between the sidewalks and the buildings, swards of what looked to be purple grass.

THERE were thousands of people on the streets. Some walked, some rode in odd conveyances behind strange-looking animals, some rode in spheres like this one. The spheres seemed capable of both land and air-travel.

I felt as though I were riding in some strange interplanetary conveyance, except that Naeco had made it seem simple. We were radio-controlled, though Naeco did not give the force a name. I suppose he felt I would not understand it!

There were squares, rectangles, circles, in the city below us. There were great commons. There were huge platforms which suggested gathering places for music, or speech-making. One of these platforms was shaped like a mighty star, and the top of it had a golden sheen in the light which shone over Atlantis.

I saw skyscrapers—had there been a sky!—as tall as any I knew at home. I saw buildings which must be temples, because nothing less than the gods should have any right to the use of them. The city seemed to lie on a great level expanse . . .

"Only the City of the Golden Gate was considered valuable and important enough to save, when the continent sank," said Naeco. "After all, the great folk lived here, then as now. The common people lived outside the walls. We let the sea take them!"

I gasped in horror, though all this had happened ages ago.

"They did not matter," said Naeco. "They were not descended from the gods, as were the great-folk!"

Great-folk! The way he talked of drowning people, the way he assumed that only his own kind was worth saving from the sea!

"Just how many," I said calmly, "were drowned, do you suppose, when Atlantis went down?"

"I never suppose," he said. "I know. Our census-taking was precise. Sixty-three million, four hundred and seventy-two thousand six hundred and

seventeen common people drowned in the sea which now covers the City of the Golden Gate!"

"And they could have been saved?"

"Had we believed them worth the effort, but how could they be? They had served their purpose. They had wrested ores from the ground for us. They had gathered their wealth together in the Cities, especially in this, the Capital City. Had they not been drowned it would have been necessary that we support them. Drowning was the simplest way out of what might have been a difficult situation."

"Did *they* know Atlantis was going under?" I asked.

"Why should we have warned them, and had them swarming into the Cities? No need to let them make trouble for us. They were so stupid they did not even realize why they were being used to construct a dome over the City of the Golden Gate."

I looked at Sitnalta. She did not seem to be much concerned about this wholesale, apparently unnecessary destruction of human life. But then it was an old story to her, a very old story. I drew a little away from her. I could not help it.

Now and again I looked up, trying to fathom the system by which the ocean was kept out of Atlantis. I could not solve the riddle. I hated to ask Naeco. I looked down, spotting those artificial suns scattered through the city—which I soon knew to be vaster than London and New York combined. The light was sunlight, I felt sure; but how was it trapped down here, miles beneath the ocean? I'd find out, if I could, without asking the snobbish brother of Sitnalta.

"Since I don't know any place here," I said, "I suppose it's foolish of me to ask where we're going?"

"We're going to the suburban palace of His Majesty, King Poseidon," said Naeco quietly. "His power is slight, but we must pay attention to him, as a matter of tradition. We must satisfy his curiosity, let him see you. He may even wish to go along when you are put through your tests . . ."

"Tests of what?" I demanded.

"Mentality. Courage. Resourcefulness."

And that's all he would tell me.

WE LEFT the city behind. Now and again we changed direction, as though we had switched to another line. We traveled in silence. I could not even hear the whisper of wind created by our own swift flight through the air above the sprawling land.

I straightened as we soared over what seemed to be a great stretch of

badlands. The badlands of the Dakotas. The tumbled masses of rock in the ravines of the Rockies. The tangle of forest in the deep tropics. All these things, together and separately, would not have given an adequate picture of the utter desolation in that vast area below. Sitnalta seemed a little uneasy, as though she were afraid that the Aero-Sphere would fall into that hellish jumble of brown and yellow rocks—or what looked to be rocks—of crags and gullies and ravines, of nightmarish forests, in which unbelievable things, some of them of huge size, moved swiftly about.

“What’s that place below, Naeco?” I asked, trying to appear unconcerned, though an aura of horror seemed to float up from the place, and to enter the Aero-Sphere itself.

“The hunting preserve of His Majesty. Also an experimental breeding place, where we try to develop new and tasty meat-foods for our tables. It is rather difficult at times, because there are so few descendants of the common-people survivors of The Sinking, to attend the place. And attendants are constantly being careless, and being devoured.”

“What sort of animals? They look pretty savage from here. I’m glad I’m not down there.”

“You’ll see the place much more closely, soon. No visitor could be allowed to depart without passing through the Preserve!”

“Passing through!” I ejaculated, then bit off short any other words I might have been tempted to say. This might be one of my tests. Naeco showing me the Preserve, to see whether the sight of it unnerved me. I knew he was carefully watching me, from the corner of one eye. Sitnalta looked straight to the front, seeming not even to breathe.

We finally circled away to the right, toward the north, and I could see the Palace grounds of His Majesty, Poseidon. They were utterly unbelievable. They shone in such splendor in the light of “suns” erected at the four corners of a vast quadrangle, that I would not have been surprised to find out that every building was made up entirely of precious stones—probably diamonds, sapphires and rubies. I suppose I get the names of those stones from the “sun” designs on the front of Naeco’s tunic, and Sitnalta’s dress.

Those “suns!” I had to know what made them work. As an engineer I could see that it must have been a pretty problem to light Atlantis after it sank. I did not believe that sunlight could filter through four or five miles of ocean. That it could somehow be *pulled* through struck me as possible, but I hadn’t the slightest idea how even to begin working out a plan. And here was one that actually worked.

I also noted another thing, in the flight from the City of the Golden Gate. People who passed any one of the suns, stopped and faced that sun for just a

moment, touching head and breast with the right hand—as though it were a religious rite.

I shouldn't have asked, I know, but I did:

“Do your people still worship the sun?”

Naeco moved so slightly that I scarcely believed it. He was on his feet, had turned on me, and his hands were fast on my neck, his thumbs digging into my throat, before I could realize that I had somehow offended.

“How dare you?” he grated through set teeth. “How dare you so much as suggest that our people might ever *not* worship the Lord of the Universe?”

I couldn't answer him. I grabbed at his wrists, trying to pull his hands free. My breath was shut off, and my eyes were blacking out. At the moment when I would have lost consciousness, Sitnalta touched her brother on the shoulder with that scepter. He released me at once, staggered back against the side of the Aero-Sphere as though it had been struck by some terrific force. I bore that in mind. The Scepter of Sitnalta had plenty of kick in it.

Naeco glared at his sister, his teeth showing in a snarl. He started to say something, but Sitnalta merely met his eyes, and his own lowered. She was the boss, no doubt about that. I knew that the scepter represented power. But what did the small sphere represent? I looked at it, after I noticed the effect of the scepter, and she answered, calmly, my unspoken question.

“It is the means by which I see wherever I wish to see,” she said. “This is the Sphere of Complete Vision and Audition. Vision is complete, however, only throughout Atlantis—for what else is there to see that is important? Hearing, however, is of greater extent. Do you care to know, for instance, whether that great machine of yours has resumed work?”

I nodded, unable to speak. She held the sphere directly over my head. The back of her hand even touched my crown—which gave me a sensation as of an electric shock, so great was this woman's effect on me. What she did to adjust the sphere I do not know. Nor could I hear anything in it. And after a bit she removed it.

“Your machine does not yet move,” she said.

“I trust your people have not lost their courage!” said Naeco ominously.

“If they have there is no point in keeping *you* alive!”

He looked back the way we had come, back over the Hunting Preserve, and I knew that his own words had suggested ways to him by which a despised Outsider could die. And I liked none of them.

NAECO turned back to the apparently simple controls of the Aero-Sphere. We began to descend. We touched the purple grass lightly, in front of what I took to be the principal palace. Men in garments only less

ornate and gorgeous than those of Naeco and Sitnalta, came rushing from buildings to right and left, to draw up in two ranks, facing each other. Thus a lane of men, a kind of guard of honor, though I could see no arms of any kind, stretched from our Aero-Sphere to the door of the palace.

Naeco and Sitnalta got out as the door was opened by two of the fancy-dressed men, who bowed their heads on their breasts, as though they were more than anxious not to look at the faces of these two people—whoever these two might turn out to be.

Four other men were stretching a great runner, or carpet of crimson, from the door of our Aero-Sphere toward the door of the palace. But before I could put foot on that rich runner Naeco snapped at me:

“Don’t put your alien feet on royal tapestry!”

I swallowed the humiliation, because I knew instantly that if I didn’t the menials would strike me dead in the batting of an eye. I walked just to the left of the unreeling runner, while Naeco and Sitnalta, side by side, Sitnalta on the right, led the way to the door of the palace.

The runner rolled up a flight of nine steps, through a door, across a vast floor in a monster room like a cathedral, through a series of huge bronze, bolt-studded doors, into what I took to be an audience hall.

There an obese man sat on a throne, peering at us through eyes below which were, literally, pouches of fat.

“Who is this creature, Naeco, whom you bring to pay homage to Poseidon?”

The fat man’s voice boomed like a vast drum. Naeco turned to me before answering Poseidon.

“Down on your knees, and touch your head to the floor in obeisance to His Majesty, Poseidon!”

“Are *you* going to?” I asked.

“Sitnalta and I are the chief scientists of Atlantis, and by tradition exempt from the obeisance!”

“Then, as far as I am concerned, I’ll see the old boy in Hell before I’ll bend the knee to him! And you can take that or leave it!”

The old boy on the throne didn’t miss a word of my atrocious ancient Greek, which served me none too well when I wanted to be slangy and insulting. He glared at me for a moment, then roared with laughter. He made me think of Old King Cole. His belly wobbled like a great tub of jelly.

“At last, someone to refuse you obedience, Naeco,” he said. “What are you going to do about it? Going to make him get down on his knees?”

This time I was expecting it, and I started the right-hander almost before Naeco made his move. I aimed smack at his button. And the blow went

home, perfectly. Naeco, chief of Atlantis' scientists, descendant of the people's greatest hero and heroine, took a knockout punch, and went out cold at the feet of his king.

Poseidon roared.

"At last! A descendant of the Great Ones is abased before his sovereign! I've hoped to live to see the day. But young man, he'll have your heart for this—if I let him! And being of a mood to be amused, I may let him!"

I looked at Sitnalta—and the condemnation in her eyes was in itself a sentence of death.

CHAPTER IV

POSEIDON

WELL, I figured I had cooked my own goose. That Naeco and his sister were powers in Atlantis was plain. That Naeco was an egotist who couldn't stand ridicule was also obvious. And fully two hundred men of the court of Poseidon—I gathered that all the kings of Atlantis were called Poseidon, a name that had been handed down from ages before The Sinking—had seen me knock Naeco cold. The king roared with laughter, but I knew there'd have to be a reckoning. When it came to a showdown—and Naeco would be sure to demand one—the old fat one would have to side with his chief scientist. Chief Scientist, to me, meant High Priest. I imagined that his status was something like that.

Naeco stirred. Sitnalta had moved up and taken her place on a "throne" only slightly less elevated above the rich mosaic floor of the palace, leaving the floor to Naeco and me. I supposed he'd have some sort of weapon, but what would they have in Atlantis? A ray gun to burn me to a cinder? Some crushing force that would simply disintegrate me, blow me throughout Atlantis? I had no way of knowing. But a man like Naeco didn't have power without knowing many sorts of uses for it. I watched him as he stirred, sat up, dazedly, exactly like a fighter who hasn't quite got up before the full count, and is trying to figure out just what part of the roof fell on him. The courtiers of Poseidon were utterly silent. I looked around at their faces—all of them entirely too handsome—and knew that none of them liked Naeco, though they'd do whatever he told them. Those Courtiers were all over six feet tall, too. Any one of them would be a handful, even for a man who knew how to use his fists.

Naeco noticed the silence. Then he noticed me. His face went dead white with fury. He looked at Poseidon, and the king looked back at him. That the

king was getting ready to burst out laughing again was plain, and I didn't want that to happen. I wanted a break; I'd lost my head, but that was no reason why I should also lose my life.

Naeco got to his feet, glared at me again, walked toward me, his legs somewhat rubbery, a fact which he could not understand. I wondered how many ages had passed since Atlantis had known anything about fisticuffs.

Naeco stood before me. I watched him warily. I watched his hands, waiting for an overt move, intending to crack him down again, if he gave me a chance, and wasn't too fast in bringing out some outlandish weapon.

Instead, he looked at my right hand.

"Let me see," he said.

I held up my hand, palm upward.

"What was the force you used?" he asked grimly.

The man actually didn't know what had hit him!

"It's a force that is my personal own," I told Naeco. "I can teach others in its use but I want to let you know, before you start making demands, that I will teach it to none who tries to compel me to do so!"

"What?" roared the King. "Not even Poseidon?"

"I'll be glad to instruct Your Majesty," I said instantly. "But this High Priest of yours has been in my hair ever since he yanked me into the City of the Golden Gate, and I'm getting sick of it!" It gave me a sort of amusement to confound these people with New York slang, badly wrenched into Greek.

"In your hair?" repeated Poseidon.

"He's been treating me as an inferior, and in my own country nobody treats me in such a fashion."

"You're an important man in your own country?" asked Poseidon, while Naeco turned my hand over and over, looking at it, and then ran his palms over my clothes, looking for some concealed weapon.

"In my country all men are created equal. Nobody bows down to anybody else, even kings . . ."

"Barbarians!" said Naeco.

"Take it easy, Pal," I said to Naeco, "if you don't want the lights to go out again."

"Lights to go out?" he repeated. "Lights?"

"Yes, your own. You have lights inside you, you know. I have a trick by which I can put them out. It's painless, but effective . . ."

Poseidon roared with laughter again. Uncertainly his courtiers joined in, which didn't help my situation with Naeco, nor with Sitnalta, in the least. Sitnalta might not have minded had I slugged the king or one of the courtiers, but I knew she regarded the humiliation of her brother as a personal

matter, a blow at her own prestige. She might like me, after her fashion, but not until Naeco had been restored to his egotistical stature. Naeco frowned at the ring of richly garbed courtiers—all of whom had “sun” designs on their tunics, though none as brilliant as those of Naeco and Sitnalta—and the courtiers fell silent, obviously afraid of his power.

POSEIDON saved the situation.

“Pettis,” he said, giving an odd twist to the pronunciation of my name, “can you think of a single reason why I shouldn’t spill the ocean onto your people down under my kingdom, and give ourselves another twelve thousand years of seclusion from meddlesome barbarians?”

“No,” I said, “I can’t. I gather you can do it if you wish. But Naeco told me I would have to go through certain tests, and if I passed them maybe my people would get a break. And for myself I can’t think of anything I’d rather do than be the man who opened Atlantis to the outside world again.”

“What’s your world got to offer men like gods?”

I looked at the paunch of the king who spoke of himself as a “man like a god,” and tried not to let my disgust show in my face.

“Greater scientific marvels,” I said boldly, considering that I knew next to none of the marvels of Atlantis. We have Aero-transportation that is three times as fast as yours. We can share it with you. We have beautiful cities. We have vehicles of all kinds in which to travel, on land and on sea. Not vehicles drawn by animals, either. Every man in my country, if he wants to, can own a vehicle that doesn’t have to be pulled by some animal . . .”

“Is your land a country of kings?” roared Poseidon. “Has it no gentry? No plebians?”

“In my country,” I said, suddenly feeling very proud, “a man can be a king if he wants to—for kings, gentry and plebians are born equal. They make themselves what they will . . .”

“I don’t believe it!” roared Poseidon, while a murmur of disbelief ran around the great table, where the courtiers still sat in silence to listen to my halting, ancient Greek. “What else have you?”

“Food!” I said. “The food of many nations. Food that makes the food of Your Majesty, superb as it must be, taste like nothing . . .”

“Many nations?” he repeated, disregarding the matter of food, to my surprise. “No one nation has conquered all the others?”

“No. My world has many nations, of which my own is the greatest. Each nation has its perfect cooks, its national dishes.”

“Tell me about some of them!”

I did, drawing largely upon my imagination. There were many high-

toned dishes I had never tasted nor hoped to taste. I must have done a good job, for his lower jaw sagged, and his lips drooled. Food was plainly his weak spot. Naeco knew that I was playing on Poseidon's weakness, but he half smiled, and I wondered wherein I was making a mistake. He shouldn't be so pleased, the way I was getting around His Majesty. Sitnalta was merely watchful—and I was growing more and more afraid of her as the moments sped.

"What good would it do Atlantis," roared Poseidon, "if your people could visit Atlantis when they wished?"

"Your people could also visit the nations of my world!" I said, reasonably enough, I thought.

"Why should any resident of the City of the Golden Gate ever desire to go anywhere else? Naeco, get on with your tests of this man. He is impudent, presumptuous, and full of lies. Presumes to think we of Atlantis have the slightest curiosity about his lands or his people, or care to trade with them. And he lies where he intimates, nay, even insists, that food Outside can compare with the table of Poseidon of Atlantis! Take him away; let him sample the food and drink of the gods to his satisfaction, that he may know the futility of his lies."

I jumped to my feet.

"And if I pass these tests, Sire?" I asked.

"Then maybe I'll permit some of your people to visit Atlantis occasionally, if they come bearing proper tribute. Go ahead, Naeco."

There is no adequate way of describing the feast set before me after we left Poseidon. You may have read of the pomp and gluttony of Roman banquets. They are pale in comparison. I dined with Naeco, Sitnalta, and the nobles of Atlantis as no man has dined in our world for twelve thousand years.

HALF an hour after the banquet Naeco and I, the only occupants of the Aero-Sphere, were slipping down to another landing. Dead ahead was the border of the grim, desolate Hunting Preserve. As we landed and rolled up to that border, I noted that it was surrounded by a high wall.

Directly ahead of us was a huge gate.

"I'll give you all night to explore the Preserve," said Naeco, with a cold smile. "There'll be no reason for me to return tomorrow to see how you fare, but I'll do it anyway. This, Pettis, is the first test. Nobody has ever come through it alive!"

I went through the great door which two attendants opened for me.

It closed behind me. I was unarmed.

I stared into the gathering gloom, toward the tumbled heart of the King's Hunting Preserve.

The place was a hideous nightmare, a-crawl with life Paracelsus might have imagined.

A creature of ghastly proportions saw me, and such a sound as I had never heard on earth, crashed against my eardrums. I couldn't believe it. Things like this had been extinct since long before man crawled out of the ooze and became a man. Its roaring bellow was enough to shrivel one with terror. It began to move toward me. I turned for a swift look at the door, the high wall.

There was no escape.

I had no weapon save my fists, feet, and wits. Death was closing in on me with the speed of an express train.

CHAPTER V

WAKING NIGHTMARE

HOW shall I describe that which no man of modern times has ever seen? Shall I say, as I believe, that the creature which charged upon me with its terrifying roaring, was that animal which has come down to us in myths as the dragon? Shall I say this, knowing that man has always regarded it as a creature of mythology? What else can I say, when the creature so nearly resembled that bogy of all good fairy-tales? It was somewhere between a giant saurian, its bluish body studded with gleaming silver scales that looked like polished armor, and the dinosaur. It was larger than the one by far, smaller by far than the other.

Beyond it, as it came undulating like a train of cars on a curved mountain railroad, I could see a nightmarish area, a poisonous jungle of many colors; all colors of the rainbow, yet so mixed that the color was not beautiful but hideous, like the color of inexpressible fear.

Fear? I feared that oncoming creature as I had never feared the monsters of my childish nightmares, and I had feared those things so greatly that I had always buried my head under the covers, or yelled for my parents to come to the rescue. But I could not do that now. I had to face issues, not run from them.

How did other men tackle brutes like this "dragon" of the Preserve? They destroyed them from Aero-Spheres perhaps, or ambushed them in the company of many men. I could do none of these things. I was alone, with a wall at my back.

Was there any possibility of passing this, the first of the tests by which

all my people and country would be judged? There must be some place else, Naeco would not have said he would return in the morning. Had any Atlanteans ever spent a night, unarmed, in this place of horrors? I imagined so, and resolved that if anyone on the earth could do it, so could I. I had to, therefore I would.

But how? Not by doing what other men did; not by trying wildly to escape. Not by tackling it with puny weapons of hands and feet, which were as useless as match-sticks against a machine-gun. A flash came to me: I remembered the tale of how a pugnacious wire-haired terrier had chased a lion, because the lion had never seen such a creature in his life, certainly nothing so small had ever dared to challenge his kingly might.

Would it work?

I had no time to think of anything else. I must try it, and I must not be afraid. I charged straight at the creature which was thundering down upon me. I flailed my arms and yelled at the brute. I did not duck aside nor dodge. Surely it had seen many human beings in this Hunting Preserve but none had ever attempted this. The element of surprise was my only weapon.

But the creature's small brain could not grasp this new thing—not at once, anyway. Would it realize in time before it had trampled me into a bloody pulp, in the strange soil of the Preserve?

I shouted at the thing as we approached each other. I yelled and ranted like a madman. I stopped as I ran, and caught up whatever my hands could grasp. Dirt. Rocks of some kind. And I hurled them with either hand, because my hands, too, were weapons. My fists were no good, because I could make no impression on the creature with them, even if he stood still and permitted. But had anybody ever tried to fling dirt in its face?

So, I threw whatever came to hand, without knowing what it was. I saw milky, filmy dirt, scatter in the air before the creature, turning him almost into the mist of nightmare, before my eyes. I heard hard things I threw, crash against him, and rattle off.

But still he came on.

There was nothing to do now but carry out the plan which had flashed through my mind. If this creature were destined to destroy me, the sooner it happened the less time I would have to drown myself in the horror of the knowledge.

So, when all my being cried out for me to turn, to jump aside, either side, and run like a scared coyote—though the creature could cover rods to the inches I could cover at my best speed—I did nothing of the sort. I continued to race to meet him, head-on. I continued to stoop, without taking my eyes off the animal, grabbing up anything and everything, and hurling it. I could

now see its little piggish eyes, snaky eyes, rather. I could see the spray from its flaring nostrils as it snorted its fury—and knew that this was the “fire” of the “dragons.”

His shadow was over me now, so close were we to collision. Yet I had not turned aside. Had I done so there would have been a speedy end. I would, I resolved, continue on until he struck me—and the end came.

That time was on me now, together with the “dragon.”

I wanted to close my eyes, but I kept them open. And a strange, unbelievable thing happened. It was as though the creature had been a ship emerging from a fog, threatening collision with another ship, and trying to sheer off. The “dragon” pulled its head aside, and the head and long scaly neck went past me at a terrific speed. But back of the head and neck which had not touched me, bulged the right side of the monster, armed with scales, any one of which could cut me in two. And that side was as dangerous to me as the armor of a charging tank.

THEN I did jump aside, knowing that the creature could not turn so soon to see me. I felt the wind of the thing’s passing, so close that it spun me in my tracks, almost knocking me over though I was not actually touched.

Past me raced the mountainous bulk of the creature. I pulled away from that bulk with all the strength I possessed, for to have been so much as touched by it would have meant death. I was like a man standing on the platform of a railroad station, entirely too close as an express train goes by, unable to pull away, while the suction threatens to pull him under. And then, the train is past, and he topples weakly to the track, behind the last car. But I must not do this, for the brute would turn again, and I would be defenseless. I must be standing when all of him had passed, challenging him again when he turned.

Then it was that I got a break.

The surprise had done something to a creature’s brain already too small to reason, to understand anything except the authority of mountainous might. And passing me, a thing which probably had never happened with any other victim in his life, he could not think fast enough to save himself from the huge wall beyond.

He crashed against it with unbelievable force. It was almost as though a bomb had exploded against that wall. I could hear it protest, for hundreds of feet in either direction from the point of impact. The head and neck of the creature doubled against the wall. The mighty bulk of it, behind, could not be halted or braked down in time. The animal seemed to telescope against the rock wall, his monster tail flying high, so that for a moment I thought he

was going to somersault over the wall. That idiotic idea had a strange effect on me. If the creature somersaulted out of the Preserve, I'd swear to that high-hat Naeco that I had thrown him over, by the tail!

But I quickly got over a desire to laugh, which I knew to be hysterical reaction from the horror that had not really passed, but had only just begun. No blow like that would more than stun the monster which had charged me.

I looked where the head curved away from the wall, as the bulk of the thing whirled to the left, and sprawled his whole length against it, a series of monstrous-taloned feet kicking the whole snaky length writhing in pain. I saw the head turned so that the snaky eyes could see me. The breath of the creature hissed out, and the sound told me that this was truly a reptile.

Then I did the hardest thing I ever had done in my life. If I had not already accepted a challenge that anybody would have told me was hopeless, and come off fairly well, I would never have attempted this. But I had to make good on it before he could get back on his feet.

I rushed the head of the "dragon." It might be a reptile equipped with a poisonous breath, or fangs. But I remembered something I had read somewhere, that great reptiles are never poisonous; while this might not apply in this land of utter strangeness, it was all I had to go by.

I dashed to that animal, then, and kicked it squarely on its snout. I kicked desperately, furiously, knowing all the time that with a blow of its head it could pulverize me, that a slap from its neck would flatten me. Such reason as it possessed was here in the tiny skull. If I could keep it from what little thinking was possible for it to do, I might still have a chance. I kicked it again and again, as the head darted this way and that. When it drew back from me, I followed it, before it could poise, and kicked it again.

The animal did not fling that head at me, simply because I did not give it a chance, anywhere along the line, to recover from its initial surprise. A simple thing, eh? It took courage or an utter brainlessness, to do it. But the fact that I lived through indicated that there was some justice in my assumption that a superior brain should triumph over an inferior brain, whatever the armament of the inferior brain.

Finally, I did another foolhardy thing. I had kicked that head until greenish sap oozed from it in many places. I gathered that this sap was its blood, strange though the color was.

Then, I stepped back, and watched to see what the "dragon" would do.

WAS it the only one in the Preserve, I wondered as I watched? Would I have this to do over and over again, with each passing few minutes?

The "dragon" collected itself, like a reptile trying to draw its coils atop

one another, and rose. It was still as powerful as it had ever been, except for just one thing: it had been beaten down by this small creature which now stood so far below its high ridge of apparently endless backbone.

The neck craned down at me; the nostrils snorted, but fearfully. The neck started to double, as though coiling to spring. And I rushed at the brute, screaming, swinging my arms. And it did the natural, automatic thing. It twisted that neck far to the side, pointing the head toward the interior of the Preserve, away from the wall against which even that neck had almost been broken.

I screamed again, and the “dragon” started to move away, gathering speed as it went . . . until the riotous, poisonous jungle out of which it had charged had swallowed all of it except that ridge of serrated backbone.

I looked about me then, feeling plenty cocky. Atop that brute, had I been Tarzan, I could have ridden anywhere in the Preserve, without danger. I should have mounted the brute. He would never have known I was on his back, once I had passed beyond the compass of his tiny ears, his ophidian eyes.

But I couldn’t have everything. Now, what should I do? I had to spend the night here. Should I be as quiet as possible, stay here against the wall, and hope that nothing would notice me until morning came? I would probably pass the test if I did, but somehow that did not suit me. It offended my sense of the proper balance of things. I had driven off the king of this weird jungle; should I be afraid to follow him into the depths of it?

I wouldn’t do it. Maybe I had passed a test, and would be accepted more graciously when morning came, but had I passed the test completely in my own mind? Not if I stayed here, and could tell Naeco and Sitnalta nothing of the Preserve, whenever they should care to ask me.

So, whistling to keep up my courage—not loud lest I attract yet stranger things to me—I followed the spoor of the “dragon” into the jungles.

It was not yet night—I refused yet to think what meant “night” here, and what “day,” and how they were regulated—when I started into that desolation; a desolation vaster than any Poe could describe.

HOW shall I describe that jungle? All of us have seen toadstools, but have we seen them growing forty feet tall, topped by umbrellas with the spread of great banyans, those tops dripping gooey substances which entrapped anything that touched them? Trapped the creatures of many strange kinds which blundered into them, then folded down their great umbrellas like mouths opening outward, to take the trapped things into their maws? I saw such things—acres and acres of them, hideous purple, dappled

by patches of pale green a foot in diameter, as though their purple were diseased by some unbelievable blight.

And all of us have seen kelp, offshore in our oceans. We have looked down into kelp-beds from boats, perhaps have felt the cold caress of it against our naked limbs while we swam. But have any of us ever seen green patches of it that were alive? Every piece a tentacle that eternally quested for a victim? Tentacles that, when fastened upon something too great for their strength, seemed to call silently to all other tentacles, so that they came to the rescue, and aided the one until the victim was enmeshed as a fly is enmeshed in the web of a spider?

And I saw a "dragon," larger than the one which had run away from me, trapped by those tentacles, held fast, while countless other tentacles whistled through the air like tremendous whip from all directions in the midst of the mass, to add their shaky coils to those already tight about the helpless "dragon."

Had I not seen that creature struggling in time, I might myself have blundered in and been lost.

And I would have walked under a monster toadstool, if the nauseous odor of its dripping had not repelled me. It probably attracted other creatures.

I wandered on, setting a course that would take me straight across the Preserve, dreading the night in a way one could scarcely imagine.

I stood stock-still, when monster echinoderms with legs crawled slowly across my route of march. They did not notice me, but their spines, I felt sure, would have destroyed me in an instant. I saw great blob-things, moving so slowly that one had to watch them closely, like the hour hand of a watch, to be sure they moved at all.

Those blob-things looked like gray-white oysters larger than a thousand, than two or three thousand, of the oysters I knew, would be if all were joined together as one. And there was an odor from them which told me that this was at least an oyster descendant.

I saw things for which there were no names, nothing to which I could compare them, and gradually the truth began to dawn on me. Man had always known that there were creatures in the depths of the sea which man had never seen, might never see in ages to come. Creatures which thrive in the depths at ghastly pressure. Nightmare horror creatures, bearing their own lights . . .

"Great Scott," I told myself, "the Atlanteans have kept out the sea, but they have somehow managed to capture some of the creatures of the sea, and develop them here in their Hunting Preserve! Here are the things which

man above hoped to see when he invented the bathosphere—only to find that even in this artificial shell, he could not go down far enough to see the monsters he felt sure the ocean hid.”

And what of the night, which Naeco had mentioned? Night blacker than the depths of the sea, because this was below the sea, when I should see the creatures with the lights?

I HAVE no hope that anyone will believe that I saw those things, and escaped them, managed in some fashion to escape the sleeping horror things, like the dripping toadstools, night-blooming flowers that were eaters of everything that moved—into which I might have blundered while I fled blindly from something else.

I saw “suns,” shining with lights only less brilliant than the “suns” in the streets I had not yet traversed, and the “suns” were moving. And by their own lights, after a bit, I could see that they were on tall, waving stalks . . . below which were bodies of utter horror.

I saw flying, lighted reptiles, which I knew must have descended from eels evolved on the floor of the sea—and they were beyond words to describe, because man, never having seen them, had not planned the words, or so much as given them names. I can only compare them to the things we know, or that have come down to us in legend.

I shall not say here how the night fell, and the day ended, except that it seemed to develop progressively, from east to west—proof that the light of those “suns” really came somehow from the light of the great Sun that the people of Atlantis worshipped. The light went out in the west first, just as shadows creep eastward from the bases of our mighty mountains when the sun goes down behind them.

But the explanation remained to be found, and during that night I had all I could do to keep myself alive. Fear had left me, but horror had not.

I went straight through the Preserve that night, and came back just as “day” was “dawning,” trying to be nonchalant as I awaited the coming of Naeco.

It seemed forever that I waited for him, my back against the wall, my tired eyes roving the jungles through which I had passed before the gate creaked protest, and I turned and walked calmly through.

I had shucked off, quite comfortably, the equipment I had worn into the Bore, and now wore only my rough work-clothes—black shirt, denim pants, shoes, socks, no hat.

Naeco looked at me strangely. Somehow, I felt that he was less inimical to me.

"What ghastly, poisonous creatures you have in this place, Naeco!"

"I wouldn't say that, Pettis," he said, arching his brows. "You liked some of them well enough yesterday at the table of Poseidon!"

For just a moment, as I swayed with nausea, I wondered if his very words might not be a test, too. If so, I survived that one.

Naeco almost grinned as he watched me sway, and I felt, read my thoughts. Then he said, I suppose to help my appetite for breakfast,

"On the whole, you have done very well with the first *and simplest* of my tests!"

To cover the shock of his words I said: "You care to know about it? About last night, I mean?"

He yawned in my face. "If I hadn't known already, would I have come so early to the gate to release you?"

I didn't sock him, only because I was hungry as a wolf, and he was the key to my breakfast.

CHAPTER VI

RECAPITULATION AND THE SECOND TEST

SITNALTA had not come with her brother. I had the feeling that she had lost interest in me, which might bode ill for my future here. I also fancied that she had sent Naeco to me, knowing he disliked me, not caring much what he did about it. But why should I, who had spent a night in the Hunting Preserve of Poseidon, be afraid of Naeco now?

As the Aero-Sphere rose into the morning air, rising high so that I could look back into the desolate area of the Hunting Preserve—which, I remembered, had been my first and *simplest* test—I noted that we were headed for that section, on the southeast corner of the City of the Golden Gate, where I had caught my first glimpse of Atlantis. Was I going to be allowed to contact Rogers McLeod, who must be worried beyond expressing, about me. I rather doubted it. I doubted everything now.

For one thing, how did it happen that I was seeing the City from above, for the second time, yet had not actually entered it at any point? I had seen it from above, which told me nothing of the lives of its inhabitants.

I put it bluntly to Naeco: "Am I ever going to see the City of the Golden Gate from its own streets and sidewalks?"

He looked at me strangely, his face a sort of blank, and offered no answer whatever. That it was somehow tied up with the strange tests—during which I was being studied as though I were a strange species of beetle, and

Naeco were an entomologist—I began to feel sure. And Naeco, weirdly, was not going to talk about it.

“You may never see it closer than you see it now,” he said suddenly. “It depends on many things, all of them connected with yourself.”

The guinea pig again, and I did not understand it.

So this is how the matter stood. I had come to Atlantis by a means I did not yet understand; I had been told that the fate of everybody in the Bore—who couldn’t have the slightest idea about what was happening to me, or realize that their fate was wrapped up in me—depended on my behavior. There were hundreds of men in the Bore, hundreds more pushing out from France.

And the commerce of two great continents depended hugely on the successful outcome of the work on the Bore. If I failed, then the Bore failed—and it might be ages before it would be tried again, when this could be repeated. What would the other tests be like, if the night in the Hunting Preserve were the simplest and easiest?

And what had this studious thwarting of a close view of the city to do with it? I began to feel tremendously queer, as though all of it were becoming dream-like, as though the atmosphere of Atlantis were now going to my head, so that there was no real focus to anything and all was seen through a strange mist. And yet, when I looked carefully, there below me was all the beauty of the ancient capital of Atlantis. There I could see the queer vehicles on the street, the thousands of people, the pylons of the blazing suns.

We swept over it, circling above it so that I could see more and more of it. We rose higher, too, so that I could see the dome more clearly, the dome above which was the ocean. The ocean should have looked black yet it did not. It looked blue as the sky. Yet when the lights were on—why did not the extent of them make Atlantis visible from the surface of the Atlantic? I had an answer to that. The day of Atlantis coincided with the day above, and captains sailed the seas without seeing, because their own sun blinded them to the fire below.

Naeco was showing me, tantalizing me. I could not tell of what material the dome of the city was constructed. That it was of something substantial beyond any work of man, was obvious. And yet—men had bored under many rivers, and we ourselves had bored out from New York City; why should not an ancient civilization, warned five hundred years in advance, known how to save their capital? But how had they done it? And why was I being shown these wonders, without explanation?

Naeco smiled as though he read my thoughts, and the Aero-Sphere began to slide down an invisible “wire” to the spot before the laboratory where I had first entered it.

It touched the stones of the square before the laboratory—stones of many colors, so that the square was a mosaic of unusual beauty, and as clean as a spring wind. Naeco stepped out ahead of me. The door of the Aero-Sphere snapped shut. The ball rose into the air, untenanted, unguided, and soared away over the city—toward the palace of Poseidon.

I noted now that there was a design upon it—the design of the “sun” which emblazoned the tunic of Naeco, the dress of Sitnalta.

I GRINNED at Naeco. “I see that Sitnalta wants the car!”
“Car?” he repeated. “Oh, you are speaking of an ancient, out-moded contrivance, the car. Slang, I suppose, a way of speaking. Yes, Sitnalta, as you say, wants the car. She may join us later, in the laboratory.”

We entered a room of the laboratory I had never seen before, and men and women came to meet Naeco. They did him much honor; there was much bowing and scraping, but I could not see in any faces that they cared very much for this brother of Sitnalta.

He spoke to whoever might care to hear.

“Something to eat, for the Outsider. In the Laboratory Annex.”

He led the way into a room where there was a maze of instruments, the like of which I had never seen. Motors of some sort, with exterior drive-shafts, which moved without sound when Naeco touched certain buttons. He touched them idly, while waiting for food for me, and looked at me thoughtfully—and I guessed no move he made was made absently, without purpose. So I watched and tried to understand it.

He moved to one of those spheres which I believed was like the sphere carried by Sitnalta.

“Care to listen to your friends in the Bore?” he asked.

Surprised, I moved to the Sphere, looked into it. He had somehow adjusted it. I looked into it, as one looks into a fortune teller’s crystal—and plainly I could see the Giant Mole at work. I could see the worry on the face of McLeod. I could see the growing uneasiness on the faces of his men, and knew that they were close to mutiny.

But . . .

The Giant Mole was moving forward, as it had moved before it had begun the eccentric movement induced by Naeco and Sitnalta of Atlantis.

“There is a lesson here, Pettis,” said Naeco calmly.

Without saying more at the moment, he tuned me in so that I could hear what went on in the Bore, and in the Giant Mole. I could hear the grumbling roar of the Mole, as it bored straight into granite that was solid again, below the tremendous weight of the sea. I could see the great bit revolving.

I could see the detritus it gouged from the facing, forced under tremendous pressure into the sides of the Bore. Then I could see, when the Giant Mole stopped, the scores of long drills being worked into those sides, too, and filled with Xment, reinforcing the Bore itself.

Everything seemed to be routine, except the worry on the face of Rogers McLeod, and the growing fear of the men who served McLeod as though he had been a god—or always had so served him.

Abruptly I began to listen to individual men.

“Where in the world could that kid Pettis have disappeared to?” That was Shep Harmon, one of the oldest sandhogs, and one of the most reliable.

“There was no hole he could have dropped into,” said another, Cline Montry, “and he couldn’t have walked into the facing. But he had to go somewhere. If you were to ask me, I’d say that the Almighty never intended for man to bore under the ocean, and that if we don’t cut it out, we’re all going to disappear, just as Pettis did!”

Unfortunate talk, that. Especially when it came from the older men. Such talk traveled like wild-fire, gathering momentum as it traveled. Far faster, it would go, than the Giant Mole would go into the strata so far below the City of the Golden Gate.

I heard McLeod shout to an assistant, who seemed to have taken over my work. And Naeco tuned the sphere down so that I could hear, even above the racketing of the drills, what McLeod said to Hank Logan, my successor.

“Hank, it isn’t that I’m not dumbfounded at what happened to Pettis. I am. There’s no explanation for it, at least not in my experience. It’s uncanny and the men are afraid, and talking. I can’t hear them, but I know they are . . .”

YES, it *was* uncanny. The men were talking and I could hear them, but McLeod couldn’t. And now he was talking with my successor, and the men could not hear. They were close enough to touch one another, with a little moving about, and yet they could not hear—while I, two miles above them, with solid rock in between, could hear everything. I could almost hear the sweat drop from the forehead onto the back of McLeod’s hand, when he raised that hand to check something on his inevitable panel.

“Yes,” said Hank Logan, “they’re afraid, but they’re real sandhogs. They’ll come through all right.”

“Real sandhogs, yes,” said McLeod. “But this isn’t sand. It’s solid rock, miles below the ocean. They’re beginning to think about that. They are wondering who’ll be next, now that we’ve lost our first man. You see, Hank, if we’d been losing men right along it wouldn’t be so bad. Or if they’d seen Pettis killed it would be all right, for that would be something seen and known.

But it was all so mysterious. He was whisked away, when there was no place to which to whisk him . . .”

“Interpret, Pettis,” snapped Naeco.

I did so, as swiftly as I could, my Greek coming back rapidly because I had to use it so much. I hated to let Naeco know that trouble was developing in the Bore, but for all I knew he may have been listening in on our people for years, may have known English as well as I did. So, I interpreted, and told Naeco the truth. His smile was thin, cruel.

“It would be ironic, wouldn’t it, Pettis,” said Naeco, “if you passed all the tests and your friends failed? Their failure is just as important to us as yours.”

“Look, Naeco,” I replied, “can’t I contact them somehow? I *know* I’m being tested, they don’t. Let me let them know I’m all right . . .”

“They are many, to bolster the courage of one another,” he said coldly. “You are but one. If you can come through, they should be able to! Here is your food—and the answer is no! You will contact them only after you have come through, if you do, and if they have gone about their business like men in the meantime.”

So, we were all working toward the same end. But I knew it; McLeod and his men did not. It was as though one man alone had the secret of life and death, and were not permitted to impart it to a friend who sorely needed reassurance.

I dipped into the steaming food which came to me in a big bowl, with a spoon of silver in it. It was a kind of soup. I suspected it, as I suspected everything else in Atlantis, but I had made up my mind to one thing—I would not ask what it was until I had sated my hunger—for fear Naeco would tell me!

And all the time, as I ate, Naeco moved about among the machinery in this room—I could hear the purring of machinery in other, adjoining rooms—and I followed him, trying to make out what the gadgets were for and how they worked.

That Naeco was leading up to a test I was sure. That it would take me by surprise, like an unexpected exam in school, I was positive. That he didn’t want me to pass it I was equally positive. But why did he bother? Why hadn’t he and Sitnalta, if they were doubtful of the worth of McLeod’s men, and the nation behind him, simply flood the Bore and destroy them all? It would be years before anybody could reach them at best.

There was still a vast mystery here.

Could it be possible that, after a hundred and twenty centuries, Atlantis secretly yearned for a sight of the true sun, for atmosphere that was not synthetic, for the ability to soar to other planets if they wished, instead of being prisoners under the dome that protected their city?

Were they so arrogant about the manner of their deliverance that they would not accept it at the hands of people whom they considered inferior? This might be it. For had Naeco not said that only the great-folk had been saved? If he believed this, and all Atlantis with him, he must regard—and they must regard—all those who had managed to escape, and to populate, down the centuries, the world which rose when Atlantis sank, as one with the people who hadn't even been considered important enough to warn that doom was upon them!

No wonder, if I had guessed rightly, he looked upon me with disdain.

I gave my empty bowl to an attendant. Then, taking a deep breath, I asked Naeco the ingredients of the soul-satisfying soup. He told me in detail, using words I didn't understand. Then he described the foods, and what I had eaten had been made up of choice portions of the following: “dragon” tail, those ghastly toadstools, the eye-columns of those nightmarish monsters with the lights for eyes, “unicorn” hoof, spiced by select portions cut from those ghastly tentacles of kelp I had seen reach out to devour one of the monsters in the hunting Preserve!

A more horrible mess could not be visioned. Yet, when I managed to retain control of myself, and remember, I had never tasted anything better, anywhere! It didn't matter, I fancy, what a thing looked like *before*; it was the *taste* of it that did matter!

“Now,” said Naeco, stopping before a star-shaped piece of something that looked like quartz—which I'll have to describe a bit more. I say it was star-shaped, which is true. But it was also a cone. Imagine a cone two feet in diameter, the large end of it cut into the shape of a star—and the cutting continued to the tip, to form a star no larger than the head of a pin, and you can understand about what that star-cone looked like.

I knew, looking into it, that it was a machine of some sort, of tremendous power.

“**N**OTICE the slot in the bench,” said Naeco, indicating a slot which, I could see, would receive the star-cone, as a thread receives a screw. But at the bottom of the slot there was a second slot, of a different shape. It was a small rectangular aperture, which flared away below the opening, to a stranger shape still—a *shape that was a small replica of the tunnel into which I had stepped when I had walked into the facing!*

I made a swift estimate, and felt that power of any kind, hurled outward and downward from this strange apparatus, would spread, after going two miles, until it attacked an area about the size of that into which I had blundered when the facing had “kidnapped” me. But I gave no sign, and

Naeco said:

"This is the second test. Tell me, Pettis, exactly how you were snatched from that great machine of yours, in the Bore! If you're an engineer worthy of the name, you'll have grasped the principle by this time!"

The star-cone was in it, I knew, and the slot into which it obviously fitted. I forced my brain to superhuman effort, to figure it out. I had walked into the facing. It had closed behind me. Then I had been pulled up into the room of the picture, up into Atlantis, in the blinking of an eye—as though drawn by invisible power. That's all I had to go on, and I had to have an answer, in a hurry—or I had failed in the second part of my test, and had lost my life, and the lives of my friends in the Bore.

I talked. I talked fast, with sweat dripping from my brow, and thinking, even as I started, that facing the "dragon" in the Preserve, and spending a night among the horrors of the Preserve, had indeed been the easiest part of the series of tests.

As I talked, I stared into the eyes of Naeco, looking for signs that I was right or wrong.

"It's simple enough," I said, recalling, just as I used those words, how the Giant Mole turned even granite into dust, and then turned it back into granite again, against the sides of the Bore. "Your star-cone—naturally I don't know its name, as we don't have exactly that sort of apparatus in my land—is charged with a cosmic force. In my country we have a name for that force: electricity. Another word, radio-activity," I said this, hoping he would accept my statement for it, though I was none too sure of myself. "We have been able to split the atom with this force. Very well, you drop the star-cone in this slot, which guides the power in the cone, forcing it downward. You already have figured out by your precision instruments, right where the Giant Mole, which moves at a certain rate, will be at a given time.

"You set your force in motion. It is, in effect, a disintegrator. It blasts into the earth, into the rock, to the depth you desire. You know of our Y-ray, and how far we can see into granite with it. You blast a small tunnel ahead of the Bore. When the Giant Mole stops because my master has to investigate, you close the end of your crypt, so that the facing appears to be smooth. You do it all with this star-cone."

His face told me nothing. He still listened, however, so hope began to rise in me. What I said sounded fantastic to me, but what had happened to me, and still was happening, was even more fantastic, so I kept right on talking.

"We did what you expected. I walked into the trap. You closed your crypt again, behind me. I was your prisoner. Then . . . then . . ."

I hesitated here, having no idea how I had been snatched up through two miles of rock into Atlantis. Then I plunged.

"To reintegrate the granite," I said, "you simply reversed the process. The granite on the bottom of your crypt began to build under my feet, lifting me with breath-taking speed, up to the level of Atlantis. When I stood in that first room, in Atlantis, there was nothing below me but the solid granite, as firmly in place as ever it had been. I might add," I said hastily, wondering if, here at the last, I had missed the boat somehow, "that it could have been done in another way. I myself could have been disintegrated by that power of yours, and reintegrated in your reception room—and there might have been no crypt at all. If it had been an invention of mine, that's how it would have worked."

HOW did he take my wild, desperate explanation? First, he asked a question:

"You saw my sister and me through what you call the facing, remember? How did we get down there, when it was ourselves who operated the star-cone?"

I had forgotten about that entirely. What should I say? I had no explanation. But I had to say something:

"You did it with mirrors!" I said, hoping he wouldn't understand that strictly New Yorkese expression, but that it would puzzle him until I could think up a reasonable explanation. He grinned, to my amazement.

"Very good," he said. "Quite good, in fact. We *did* do it with mirrors, throwing our reflections into the crypt, as you call it, and against the end of the crypt nearest your facing!"

Luck? Of course it was luck! I could have racked my brains for a week, and would never have thought of mirrors. I simply said mirrors, and it was right. But how about the rest of the "test"? Had I given the right answer, or any parts of the answer? I did not know.

"I'll take you now," said Naeco, much more pleasantly than he had hitherto spoken to me, "to that section of the laboratory where our light is controlled, and synchronized with day and night above the sea! If you can answer the riddle of our light, you will have passed the third test with success. Already," I thought he said this last grudgingly, "you have advanced into our science to matters which are only within the knowledge of Sitnalta and me, and those whom we train as our assistants!"

"I suppose," I said, "that one of your tests will be to quizz me on why the sky doesn't fall!"

"Why the sky doesn't fall?"

"Yes, and why it is blue. In short, why the bottom of the ocean isn't black—and why it doesn't come into Atlantis and smash it flat!"

"You are quite correct, Pettis," said Naeco. "But that is something for the future. Meanwhile, to the source of our holy suns!"

I paused, as he headed for another room, to study the Vision-Audition Sphere. I tuned in, as I remembered Naeco had, on the Giant Mole.

The Mole was still grumbling and growling on its way! Destruction had not been visited upon it. *I had passed this part of the grim series of tests!*

But there was trouble in the Giant Mole, for I saw McLeod and Logan, with sections of drill in their hands, fight off an attack by a number of the super-sandhogs—fight it off fiercely, as though the fight were to the death. I saw the attackers knocked down as though their brains had been splattered out by the pieces of drill.

And I could not make contact! All I could do was hurry on behind Naeco, and hope that I could satisfy him before McLeod's men had brought doom upon themselves in their fear of the unknown.

We entered a room which almost took my breath away, and there Sitnalta awaited us. Naeco said something to her I did not hear—and *she smiled at me, with approval!* But there was a shadow in that smile, as if she were secretly afraid. Was it that my success would be disastrous to her and to Naeco? No—she would not have smiled in that case . . .

But, remembering those grand men whom McLeod was being forced to hammer down, or by whom in the end he might be hammered down, I was too filled with trouble to feel elated.

As my success increased, doom came closer and closer to my friends in the Giant Mole.

CHAPTER VII

THE SOURCE OF THE SUNS

HERE in this vast room I now entered with Naeco and Sitnalta, was something before which Naeco humbled himself. Here Sitnalta laid aside her Sphere of Vision and Audition, and her Scepter of Power, to indicate that in no manner whatever did she challenge the solemnity suggested.

How shall one describe the room? I could call it a sun-trap, with all that that might suggest to those who love the sun and glory in its brightest rays, and be close enough to the truth. I could call it the heart of the sun—a beneficent heart, which did not sear and burn, but bathed and made pure—

and that would be right, too. I could call it a machine, erected by inspiration from the Source of All Things; inspiration given only to the very few, as it must have been given to the generations of Naeco and Sitnalta.

I could call it many things, and be right. I could explain it all the days of my life, and be wrong. For who can truly explain the sun?

It was a vast room of tremendous power. The power whispered, in the midst of a solemn silence, as the gods might whisper to men—if there really were gods, and men who could hear.

The room was perhaps a hundred feet square, and a hundred feet in height, and the roof of it seemed to how did the sun reach through the roof itself reached away for the life-giving rays of the eternal sun. There were concave “shields” upon the wall, set closely together, and each of them glowed with blazing light.

“There are as many shields as there are ‘suns’ in the City of the Golden Gate!” said Naeco. His face was exalted, and he talked like a man in a trance. So this was the reason why the capital of Atlantis was called the City of the Golden Gate! And here was the gate, through which the sun, adored by the people of Atlantis, bathed its worshippers! Here was the gate between the sun and its devotees. But how did the sun reach through the gate, through the miles of ocean, the tons upon tons of water, through the impenetrable darkness? The only answer I could find to this was that in all likelihood the sun reached through, in some manner unknown to man, even to the core of the earth itself. Surely the creatures on the very floor of the deepest ocean, must live by the light of the sun! From this premise to the idea that the Atlanteans could trap the sun, up through the ocean, it was not difficult for the mind to grasp.

“Whatever your faith, O man of the Outside,” said Naeco, sounding like a high priest intoning an ancient ritual, “forget it here in the Temple of the Source of all Life! Purge your heart of all those things which have limited the fields of endeavor of mankind. This is the Temple, and those who enter it must worship!”

I did not pretend to understand exactly what he said. I did understand that whatever my own feelings might be, however casually I accepted the light of the sun as belonging to myself, the sun was this man’s god, and this woman’s, and the god of all the people of Atlantis.

Perhaps it did not conflict greatly with whatever I believed—or what as a youth I had been taught to believe—for who so worshipped the work of the Maker, worshipped also the Maker thereof.

I felt humble. I felt exalted, carried out of myself. Here was something which a buried people had worshipped for twelve thousand years of their

interment, and untold ages before that—during ages when “there had been giants in the earth,” and “men had dominion over all things,” and “men were truly like gods.”

Could I hope to understand the purely mechanical or scientific workings of this room of the shields, which were in turn the “spark-plugs” of the “suns” that lighted Atlantis? I *must* understand, and must myself supply the explanation for them. This I was sure of for this would be another in the series of tests.

So, with a feeling of veneration in me which must have come from my own far-distant past—when for all I knew there had been ancestors of mine in Atlantis, to whom all this had been the breath of physical and spiritual life—I studied the room of shields, even as I tried to find a scientific explanation for them.

NAECO and Sitnalta seemed to have forgotten me. They strode forward together, holding hands like two children, toward the largest shield of all, which dominated the vast room. It was a shield perhaps fifty feet in diameter, and it faced the entire room from the far end of it. It rested upon a dais of porphyry, polished until it shone—and the color of the shield was a rich and brilliant, *shining* gold. If one could vision pure spirit—the light which no man sees or understands—then that which somehow miraculously animated the greatest shield of them all was pure spirit. To be bathed in its light was to give oneself without fear to the kiss and caress of the sun itself.

Naeco and Sitnalta, their faces exalted, as must have been the faces of the ancients when they thought they talked face to face with their gods, stood before the central shield. They stood for a moment, their faces lifted with pride, their faces illuminated by the light.

Then, still holding hands, they dropped to their knees upon the beautiful floor—which was covered by that same frosted gold I had seen in the room to which I had been “kidnapped” —and before the light that bathed them their garments, which had looked so regal, gorgeous and lovely to me, were as tawdry things; in themselves, that is, for with the light on them they shone as with pure spirit of their own.

Naeco began to speak, and I knew I was listening to words of great faith, from the lips of a man of ancient tradition, speaking with and to one whom, no matter what he might do in his world outside, however he might deal with his fellows, was here in the Presence—in which he believed from the depths of a soul he *knew* to be immortal.

“Great beyond Greatness, Source of All Light and Life!” said Naeco, while

Sitnalta joined in with responses, in a voice so rich with feeling that the very sound of it clogged my throat, as though already I were close to tears.

“Protector and Preserver of Life in the land of the Elect!” she said.

“Lord of the Universe! Creator of all Things!” said Naeco, his voice rising to a power of expression and feeling I would never have believed possible in a man so evidently cold to all feeling.

“Father of Waters and of Lands!” said Sitnalta. “Birthplace of Stars and Planets!”

“Oh, that to Which we Owe our All!” they both said together.

And continued together.

“May the Rays of Thy Beneficence shine down upon us, Thy Children, and the wardens of Thy Children in the ancient City of the Golden Gate, which is Thy Gate. Guide us in our judgments, as Thou hast ever guided our people in the past. If it by Thy will that this Ambassador from Outside, this Representative of another people which may be akin to ours, this Gregg Pettis of America, shall be acceptable in the Shining Eyes of our Life-Source, help us to ask only that which should be asked, and whether he believe or not, guide his brain in thought, his tongue in answering our questions. If it be not Thy Will that he succeeds, then Let Thine Anger take its course, that he may be disposed of in accordance with the Will which, centuries on centuries, we have regarded as Absolute, Unchanging, Never to Be Questioned.”

A far cry from the Hunting Preserve!

A far cry from the comparatively simple matter of disintegration and reintegration by which I had been snatched from the Great Bore, that these worshippers of the sun might look me over.

The brother and sister, kneeling there, with their faces lifted to the central, commanding shield, looking on that shield which I could no more face squarely than any man can look straight into the orb of the sun for more than a split second, seemed to be listening—as prophets are said to listen to the still voices of their Masters.

To what were they listening? For an answer to their plea to their god, the Sun?

They went on, then, still together, and somehow it came to me that this was not the first time, by many, that Outsiders had managed to visit Atlantis, or that persons of Atlantis had visited the land Outside. For their plea sounded old as time, as though every day for ages they had said it before the shield which was a symbol of the sun they worshipped.

“Oh Light of all Lights throughout the world, if this be the time for which we have waited, all these hundred and twenty centuries, guide our work that we be not mistaken, and help this outlander that he be right, that it

may not be necessary again to destroy the unfit, and merit again a long wait in darkness, beyond the reach of Thy Light. Thy symbol has become a great and holy thing to us, through all the centuries. But it yet remains a symbol, and Thine Own Light has been too long hidden from us. Whisper to Thy children through all that is to come, that we may know that this is the true time, and that the seemingly eternal wait is ended at last!"

Again they listened. Then they rose and moved backward from the central shield, and I did not realize, until they had turned to look at me, that I myself had dropped to my knees before a manifestation of power which I could not begin to understand. Nor did I rise when they noticed that I knelt—until Sitnalta bade me.

THAT both were pleased that I had honored that which they always honored; I could see in both their shining faces. I could not have explained had I tried, with all the words at my command.

"You come in a spirit of worship, Gregg Pettis," said Naeco at last. "And that is good. Are you afraid now to accept the third test? In doing this you must know that you will approach the Great Symbol, kneel as we knelt, where none has ever knelt save our own, and lived—if they were not the proper ones so to bow down!"

"Tell me what is wanted of me, Naeco and Sitnalta," I said softly, "and I shall try the best I know, for I am beginning to understand what it must have meant to you, all these centuries, that you have not been able actually to see that which is your god."

"And yours, Pettis, whatever you may believe!" said Naeco.

I waited, saying nothing. I had always been confused as to what I believed or disbelieved about superhuman things, and now I was more so than ever. One thing I did believe in, however—the power of human thought. For had not human thought, guiding human hands, builded our great cities, spanned our rivers with beautiful and mighty bridges, covered our oceans with luxury liners, sent our planes soaring even into the stratosphere? Had not human thought destroyed them, also?

What then, must be the power of the human thought which, within the narrow confines of this city below the inexplicable—as yet—dome above Atlantis, had never given over its worship of the sun? If that sun had had no power of its own—and even I knew that the existence of Earth itself depended on it—surely the power of thought of millions of people, for thousands of years, must have given it power beyond one human mind to estimate.

I had stood in many a holy place in my time, and felt the tears and prayers of those who had been there before me, bathing me gently. I had walked

softly through great cathedrals which cannon balls and bombs had grievously wounded, and understood that nothing made of man could ever really destroy the spirit of such places. Yet not one of them, however old it had been, so much as approached the age of this Place of the Sun Symbols—nor was so bathed in the hopes and fears, the laughter and the tears, of mankind.

Here men and women for untold ages had bared their secret hearts to their Source of All Things. And I could not call it pagan, and feel it as I did. I could not deny it, when I could hear the whispering of the beneficent rays.

“I come in humility,” I heard myself saying to Naeco and Sitnalta, “and if I ever hoped for anything in my life, even for immortality, I hope now to be proved the one for whom you seem to have been waiting so very long.”

And I walked past them, straight to the spot where they had knelt. I knew that what I should have to say would reach their ears, for the Symbol was also a sounding board, and I had heard even their slightest whispers when they, before me, had knelt to worship at the shrine of their Bright Source of Life.

I would blank my mind, I thought, and hope for the best. Since thought was in all this—and I believed in telepathy because I had often seen it work—my own thought must in some fashion respond to its need. I would simply wait and “listen,” as it seemed to me that Naeco and Sitnalta had listened. And all the thoughts of the worshipful ages would surely make *some* impression upon my mind, and I would put that impression into words. Of course, it sounds mystical, supernatural. But, if that be true, then all inspiration is supernatural—and great bridges, beautiful cathedrals, statues that were almost alive, had never existed first in the brain of genius. They waited for the Divine Afflatus, those who built for beauty, and I could try it myself. In any case I know nothing else to do, because my finite mind, the mind which college had trained to guide the career of an ambitious engineer, could grasp no explanation for what I had seen here—for the manner by which the people of Atlantis had “trapped the sun.”

“**I**AM minded,” I began, almost with a voice not my own, after I had knelt before that monster shield, “of attempts made by people in my own country, people whom many scientists regarded as lacking in intelligence, to make use of the rays of the sun. There have been many men who believed in that power. There have been men who have invented simple engines, simple devices, the only motive power of which were the rays of the sun . . .”

Odd that I should remember that a man had invented a washing machine, another man had invented simple toys, another had invented a motor—all of which operated solely by the rays of the sun, at this all-important

moment. Yet memory did come to me, as though by telepathy from someone in that great room with me, and with that memory a sort of stumbling explanation.

"People of Atlantis," I went on, "being possessed of great scientific gifts, as this drowned city so plainly proves, even afar back, beyond the time when my own people began to think and feel, must also have known that the sun was a source of direct power; that its rays were something that must have been intended for use. That these symbols, as you call them, are part of the great use they made of those rays, I am now quite sure . . ."

I paused, took a deep breath, and reached into my subconscious for that message, the rest of it, which must be coming to me from somewhere—perhaps even from passages in erudite books which I did not consciously remember; perhaps from courses I had taken, in logic, perhaps from my background, perhaps from long talks with Rogers McCleod—perhaps from out the Infinite, whence the incomprehensible mind, perhaps, receives that with which men are sometimes wont to startle the world.

"I see somewhere above," I went on, "a contact with the Outer world. It is hidden away, on an island, I should say. An island that is shown on none of the charts of which my people know. Maybe it is even a floating island, that the people of Atlantis can move or submerge when its discovery seems imminent. Here, on this island, is another Symbol, the true Sun-Ray Trap, carefully hidden from all of that Upper World, except only the sun itself. I cannot see how the secret has been kept through so many centuries, but it must be so. That Sun-Ray Trap, catching the rays of that sun you worship, transmits them—though at the moment I do not see exactly how—to this Symbol in Atlantis, whence it is distributed, exactly as we above distribute electricity, gas and water, to all branch stations or individuals—in this case, the "Suns" which, by day, light the streets and the buildings of Atlantis! But how is it done?"

Again I must take a jump into a bit of science I had never delved into before, because I had never regarded it as scientific—though I knew very well it might have been in possession of the ancients.

"By some power possessed by the chosen Children of the Sun," I went on, "Space and Time, between the Symbol on that secret island, and the Symbol to which I now kneel as one of you—*have been collapsed, like an accordion. The base of that far Symbol, and this Symbol, are in exact contact, so that, in actuality, though the human mind, because of its limitations, cannot see it, the sun shines directly through that far Symbol, not only into the other Symbols on the walls of this room, but the 'Suns' of Atlantis!*"

What were the implications of what I had just said? Was I right or wrong?

Was it possible that, long before Einstein, Altanteans had not only known of the curvature of time, back upon itself, and of the curvature of space, but had mastered their knowledge of it until they could bend the one at will, and collapse the other, though the depths of an ocean lie between?

I could think of no other explanation. Certainly, there was nothing in the books I knew, nor in anything I had gathered from the brains of learned men.

"And so," I said calmly, and utterly unafraid, fantastic as my explanation might have sounded, "Atlantis has sunlight by day, even as we above have it. And this is the reason. There is a secret island—a conquest of time and of space, by mechanical means—and Atlantis is saved from eternal night. And if light makes the deep-sea blue above, why should it not also make it blue below? And is not the ocean black both above and below, when there is no sun?"

Feeling a great peace within me, certain that whatever the true explanation might be, this that I had said would strike a responsive cord in the hearts of Naeco and Sitnalta—so that they would overlook any little errors I had made—*such as my failure to explain how they had taken command of time and space!*—I rose, backed away from the Symbol, and turned when well away, to look into the faces of Naeco and Sitnalta—seeking the answer to whether I had done well or ill.

"The name of the island," said Naeco softly, "is Poseidon, after our ancient dynasty of kings. It is the only spot of true Atlantis that remains above the surface of the sea. And it has been carefully hidden away. Ships that approach it are abandoned. Debris of the seven seas gather about it, to help us keep our secret. The floating barriers of seaweed are our allies, too, making the way to Poseidon impossible for even the most determined . . ."

"Sargasso Sea!" I said, startled. "Nobody has ever solved the secret of it, nor investigated it throughout!"

"Sargasso Sea?" repeated Naeco, puzzled. "I have just said, the Island of Poseidon!"

"They are the same thing," I said, "I am positive of it. Sargasso Sea, hundreds of miles south of here. But then, what are hundreds of miles, to people who have the power which is yours?"

"The Power of Our Father, the Sun," said Naeco devoutly. "I am pleased beyond words, Pettis, that you have progressed so far. But the most difficult test of all—save one, the last—lies still ahead of you. If you fail in that . . ."

"Failure," I said, "seems to indicate destruction for me. For the first time I am curious as to what will be done with me if I fail."

"I can tell you this much," said Naeco, with a glance at Sitnalta, "*that your heart will be offered to the Sun as a sacrifice. And if, having come so far, you*

still fail in the testing, Sitnalta, Priestess of the Sun, will offer your heart herself, as atonement for you and for us!"

"Atonement for you?"

Naeco glanced swiftly at his sister. For an instant she stood there unmoving, then a sad smile crossed her face.

"Tell him," she said.

"Yes, for us, Gregg Pettis. Your destiny is now irretrievably interwoven with ours, now that you have come so far. If you fail, then, after you have been sacrificed, we shall be outcasts."

"You, too, sacrificed."

Sitnalta shook her head. "An outcast is not worthy of so honorable a death. We shall be driven into the Preserve, stripped of our weapons, our names taken from us, and the very memory of us stricken from all records."

Naeco clasped my shoulder. "You have thought me an enemy, Gregg Pettis. Perhaps, at first, I was little impressed with you—we are a proud people.

"But Sitnalta and I are, in a sense, rebels, Pettis. We have dared what none have dared since the Sinking—to burst the bonds of tradition which have kept our land stagnant for thousands of years, and seek new frontiers."

"You mean," I asked, "you want to bring Atlantis to the surface again?"

He shook his head. "Not physically. But to stimulate our people again to that incessant progress, along every possible line of thought and endeavor that alone can keep a race alive."

I faced him squarely. "Then tell me, Naeco: how do these ideals of yours tie in with the 'common' people, whom your ancestors thought unworthy of saving from disaster, and whom you consider fit only for terror and eventual destruction in the Hunting Preserve?"

For an instant anger flashed in his face, then puzzlement replaced it.

"Do you mean, Man from Outside, that everyone in your land is on a common level?"

"So far as their simple rights as human beings go," I answered. "So far as their actual position in society—that depends upon what abilities they have, and how well they are able to turn them to advantage."

"That is the ideal of your people?" said Sitnalta. "But tell me, Pettis, doesn't the actual practice fall somewhat short of the theory?"

I thought of the prolonged and bitter wars, less than a decade past, when every man, woman and child of our people who held the democratic ideal sacred had been forced to devote his entire being to its defense—against the onslaught of despotism, thinly concealed as a "new order." I thought of the still-remaining traces of that despotism in our new world, united as it was for progress and peace.

"No," I said softly, "actual practice often falls short of the ideal."

"Even so with us," she replied. "We do not possess the ideals of your people, Pettis. Perhaps by prolonged contact with your kind, if it be shown that the pursuit of this 'democratic ideal' has produced a people we can admire, it will be different—surely our pride would not permit us to ignore anything which brought an inferior people up to nearly our own level of achievement."

There was a faint smile on Sitnalta's face as she said this and I thought to myself that these people would be all right with such a sense of humor.

"Then, these sacrifices to the Sun-god—?"

"More political than truly religious in your case," said Sitnalta. "The nobles hate Naeco and me for what we have already done, and they would hate us more if they knew our true plans for progress. We are tired of being Earth bound, Pettis—we want the stars.

"Tradition decrees that if you, or any other outsider, can pass the tests, then you are worthy of contact with us—if you fail, then you are sacrificed. But in this case, the nobles will demand our sacrifice, too, claiming that your failure is a sign from the Sun-god that we are unworthy. They will force Poseidon to consent and thus insure themselves of who knows how many more decades of contented decadence?

"Yes, Pettis, if you fail, our last official act will be to sacrifice you to the Sun-god."

I remembered a picture I had seen, long ago, of a victim lying on an altar, on an Aztec *teocalli*, while a feathered Indian priest held up to the blazing sun the heart he had just slashed from the body of the sacrifice! I remembered the expression on the still-living face of the victim—and remembered now that it had shocked me to the soles of my feet.

I didn't believe then than any such thing could really happen.

But I said to Naeco and Sitnalta:

"Let us hurry, please, to the rest of the test—for I am anxious for my people in the Giant Mole! And for you!"

CHAPTER VIII

CITY OF THE DOME

TO MY surprise I was taken out of the laboratory, though I had scarcely seen any of it into the Aero-Sphere again. Sitnalta and Naeco both went with me. Were we going back to jolly, fat, King Cole-Poseidon? Back to the Hunting Preserve? For a careful tour of the city which had so far been forbidden me? I really knew next to nothing of Atlantis. I could but wait and see.

"Focus your attention on what lies above you, Pettis," said Naeco, "if you would make a chance for yourself to see, in detail, all that lies below, for this is your next test."

How much time had transpired? I had no idea.

The Aero-Sphere rose swiftly, much further above the city than it had at any time previously. And within a few minutes it came to rest . . . *on the roof of Atlantis!* That's a statement to be taken literally. Remember that no matter how the Sphere rolled when it was not in the air, the seats of its passengers remained upright. It was so now.

It began to move slowly along on the underside of the dome of the City of the Golden Gate.

I forgot Naeco then, and Sitnalta, as I stared at the underside of that impossible dome, which covered a vast and glorious city. Here was something to challenge an engineer—particularly one who could calmly accept the possibility of a Sub-Atlantic Bore, as I had, long ago.

I glued my eyes to that dome, and now the beams through which power was transmitted to keep the Aero-Sphere in motion were below me, so that nothing should interfere with my vision. I could see the cubes which, fitted one into the other, made up the dome, as pieces of stone make up the arch of a bridge.

I was looking at the greatest single arch ever made by human beings—and thinking from the beginning that the might of whatever gods they had served must have gone into their brains when they had conceived it, into the hands of the millions now dead, even to their descendants, who had erected it. Frantic thoughts went through my mind:

"If the human body sustains a weight of almost a ton per square inch, from the atmosphere alone, at sea-level, up where I live, what must it sustain down here, below the ocean?"

I could estimate the answer, and miss it by millions of tons.

"Deep-sea fish, born to stand the pressure, explode when drawn to the surface. But still, they do live on the floor of the sea. And if evolution is correct, man has been evolved from fishes. Therefore, it isn't inconceivable that he can be evolved back to where he can withstand even that pressure."

Just words, meaning nothing, but messages which raged through my brain as I sought for the explanation.

"The pressure without a dome must be equaled by the pressure within, or the dome will collapse!"

Therefore, the Atlanteans must be, regardless of the dome, living under as much pressure as if the sea itself had been bearing down upon their bodies. This could not be, I was sure, for I hadn't had twelve thousand years in

which to become accustomed to such pressure. Nor had twelve thousand years, or twelve million, been enough to accustom the people of Atlantis. Therefore, somehow, they had found a way to nullify that unbelievable pressure. I must find the answer, somehow, somewhere.

It was back in the laboratory, of course.

Atmosphere for Atlantis? Could they get enough from the oxygen in the waters of the seas? Probably, since I now accepted that they could trap and distribute the light and power of the sun. That would be found in the laboratory, too. Pure water—well, that was simple. Vessels of our own, delayed at sea until their fresh water gave out, distilled fresh water from the sea. Atlanteans would do that, as simple as ABC.

It was the dome, and the “stresses and strains” of which Naeco had hinted, that I must advise myself. Were there domes within domes? Other domes above this one, with cushions of power in between, distributing the terrific pressure?

MAYBE Atlantis wasn’t as far down as I had supposed. Charts showed a vast tableland under the sea out here somewhere, across which the Atlantic cable had been carefully laid, long ago. Was that tableland the dome of Atlantis? If it was, there still had to be an explanation of why it not only withstood all that pressure, but had done so every single instant of twelve thousand years. For if so much as a trickle of water had come through anywhere, ever, Atlantis would have been again inundated.

I was getting nowhere in my thoughts, though I was going places in the Aero-Sphere with Naeco and Sitnalta.

We rolled high into the top of the dome, greater by far than the vaulted dome of the greatest cathedral. We rolled down the sides, and along them, up and down, and roundabout. And always brother and sister sat silent, and I could feel their eyes upon me, watching my face, almost praying that I solve the problem that had been set me.

But as time passed I found myself further and further from a solution. Maybe I was trying too hard. Maybe I was, as the golf-players say, “pressing.” For nothing came, and I began to despair of success. Here was a job of building that not all the engineers of recorded history could have accomplished, yet I was being asked to explain it. And just to say “cosmic forces,” which I was tempted to do, was not enough. To say “cosmic Forces” was like saying “a supernatural power,” explaining nothing that a finite mind could grasp.

It had to be simple, for when and if I went home, I’d have to be able to explain it to my own people—who were, mostly, a hard-headed lot, all of them, figuratively, from Missouri.

But what, exactly, was the answer? Could I ask questions? I dared to ask just one:

"How thick is the dome, Naeco?"

"You must make an estimate of that," he said, sternly. "Not exactly, for you probably have no such precision instruments as ours. But that is your problem, and you must come close to the answer. I will only say that it is thinner than it looks to be, or than you would suppose."

"One more question, if questions are permitted."

"They are permitted, though I may not be allowed to answer some of them."

"Is there more than one dome? Is this the inner of many domes?"

"There is," said Naeco, "but one dome!"

My problem must be plain. I, who could never have visioned such a thing as this, must nevertheless explain it. I had only this as something to go on: It had been done, for I could see it, here above me.

I racked my brains for the answer, and none came. The Aero-Sphere moved more and more slowly, as though Naeco and Sitnalta, pulling for me with all their hearts, souls and bodies, were giving me every hint they dared.

Now, as desperation rose in me, I stood up, so that my eyes could be as close to the dome as possible.

It was there that I remembered something, an instrument of my own which had not been taken from me: the tiny, Y-Ray lamp. I took it from the hip pocket of my jeans, and looked at Naeco.

"I am permitted to use it?"

"It is part of you," he said. "At least it is part of the world you come from; therefore its use is permitted." I turned the Y-Ray on that dome. I could see into the material, which looked like glass, but could be nothing of the sort, for glass would never have held such weight. By the Y-Ray I could look six feet into the stuff.

I hoped with all my heart that it would show me the ocean, but it did not. The dome was more than six feet in thickness! That, at least, was something to know, but never enough. I adjusted the Y-Ray light finer than it had ever been used before—until, dimly as through a mist, I could see ten feet into the dome—and still could not see the waters of the sea.

But I could . . . no, I was mistaken, I could not see the sea.

BUT I had seen a shadow move across the light, certainly. How deeply would a shadow penetrate the material of the dome? As though in answer to my question, the Aero-Sphere passed over one of the "suns" of Atlantis, and the shadows of Naeco, Sitnalta and myself, were cast against the dome. Luck had played into my hands again, for with the Y-Ray light I

could see to what depth the shadow went—and it was within the reach of the Y-Ray! Therefore, the shadow from beyond, of some deep-sea mammal perhaps, a mere hint of shadow, must have been projected at least as far into the top of the dome, as our shadows were projected into it from below.

And its shadow was projected because of its own light, perhaps those lights on stalks that seemed to be the eyes of so many sub-sea creatures.

Now, at least partially, I had the thickness of the dome. More than ten feet, and less than twenty.

I set on nineteen feet, and hoped that it would be nearly right. Nineteen feet of some material native to Atlantis of old, by which to keep back the waters of the sea!

I didn't have to be exact, to the millionth of an inch. I rather felt that they would not ask so much of me.

Something else I had seen, with my Y-Ray. Those cubes which made up the dome, were equipped with something! Running all through them, in all directions, were what looked to be "faults," or "stars," like the "stars" in star-sapphires. That they must have meaning, because they were within the cubes of which the dome was constructed, was plain.

But what in Heaven's name could the meaning be? I tried to make my brain—which I had always believed to be well educated—give me the answer, but none came. I tried to recall whole passages in engineering books and manuals, about stresses and strains, and could find nothing that fitted my needs.

Was I going to fail this test? Had I not the brain to give an answer to a puzzle, when all the details of it were laid out before my eyes?

I noticed, too, that the cubes were all fitted together in a special way—*and that the "stars" or "faults" in each, projected through and into the others.*

I felt that here, somehow, was the key. Not one of those cubes, dropped in mid-ocean from a ship, would have been flattened out by the pressure when it reached the bottom.

In a brown study, sure that I had seen all that I needed to see, if only I could find the answer, I sat down, and knew that the Aero-Sphere was being flown down and away from the dome.

I did not think of the city, nor look down at it. I was seeking an answer that must be found within my own head. I had all the parts of the puzzle, now I must put them together to make a sensible whole.

The Aero-Sphere came to rest in front of the laboratory.

Naeco and Sitnalta stepped out. I knew they were standing just outside, waiting—while I waited desperately for some answer to the riddle, and furiously conned in memory all that I had ever read that would bear upon the subject.

I gave it up. My brain was tired. It had to rest. Maybe they would give me time. I'd have to plead for it, knowing that my success was just as important to them as to me.

And the instant I blanked my mind, this is what flashed through it:

"Archimedes boasted that he could make a scales by which he would guarantee to weigh the world, if someone would find a place whereon he could set the scales!"

He could have done it, too, I'm sure. But what had scales to do with the dome over the City of the Golden Gate? Archimedes had not been able to lift the world—or himself—by his own bootstraps, as the people of Atlantis seemed to have done. Nobody had ever found a place for him to set his scales; his bluff had never been called.

But the Atlanteans, faced with a problem just as difficult, that of balancing the ocean, had succeeded in doing just that.

It was no answer, really, but since that much had come, maybe more would follow.

I STEPPED out of the Aero-Sphere, and followed Naeco and Sitnalta into the laboratory. They were, without being asked, giving me plenty of time.

They took me through the grim part of the laboratory wherein creatures of the deep were captured, to be taken to the Hunting Preserve and developed into food.

They took me to the vast room where food in pellet form, for the use of all people, was made.

And to another room where oxygen from the sea was procured that Atlantis might live.

They showed me the treasury, where gold filtered from sea-water, down the aeons, had been minted into coins for the exchange of the City of the Golden Gate, and I was in a brown study all the time.

And when they had shown me all, and I had absorbed little of it, because I was absorbed in my riddle, Naeco turned on me. His face, and that of Sitnalta, was very white. He was afraid, plainly, that I would fail—and, strangely, the fact that they were both afraid, gave me fresh courage, so that I could not permit myself to fail.

"The dome," I said, "is just under twenty feet in thickness. The cubes of which it is constructed are also just under twenty feet in thickness, outside surface to inside surface." They did not contradict me. They would have, had I been too far wrong. I saw hope growing in their eyes. So far, so good. Though what I had said was a simple matter.

"Each cube would of itself support the weight of the sea, if it were lying on

the floor of the ocean,” I said, “without changing shape or thickness under pressure. Therefore, each cube was compressed to its ultimate limit before it went into the dome.”

This they did not deny, either.

“Each cube,” I went on, “is reinforced with something metallic, the nature of which I do not know, nor the name, just as we, down in the Giant Mole, reinforce the walls of the Great Bore with Xment. However, in this case, reinforcing was done after the cubes were in place, so that the reinforcing elements ‘nail’ the cubes together. And the cubes are so placed that each one is a ‘key’ to the whole structure, like the keystone of a bridge-arch, or the keystone of a mountain. Therefore, when all are in place, and the dome is completed—the dome itself can no more be smashed or caused to ‘give,’ than one of the cubes can—for the cubes, in advance, each and every one of them, was pre-compressed to its ultimate limit!”

Well, there it was. I had crossed the Rubicon and must stand or fall on what I had said.

And this is what happened. Naeco rushed at me. His face was one big smile, like a harvest moon. He slapped me on the back until I thought all my teeth would jump out. He pummeled me. He grabbed my hand and shook it—and I wondered how many other of our customs went back so far!

Nor was that all.

Sitnalta herself came to me, flung her arms about me, and pressed upon my lips the warmest kiss I had ever expected to receive from anybody. I shall remember it, always. A new day had dawned in old Atlantis.

So, the handshake, the kiss, the embrace, were pretty old.

And now, what next?

I didn’t have long to wait, for Naeco said: “You might as well get the rest of it over with. The last and hardest test of all comes now.”

“While I’m so tired?” I asked, then remembered that time was the essence of the contract, at least as far as my friends in the Giant Mole were concerned.

“You could be at the peak of vim and vigor,” said Naeco, “and this would still be your greatest ordeal. You are now about to be given the key to the City of the Golden Gate!”

Shades of a million mayors—was there *nothing* new under the sun?

And why should it be such an ordeal, to see at last the city which I had only glimpsed from above?

CHAPTER IX

THE HOLDER OF THE KEY

EVEN in the olden times the great ones who ruled must have had their jests, enjoying them immensely. For Naeco, I saw, and Sitnalta, were little concerned, and much amused, about this last test they mentioned. I felt, frankly, that I was being kidded somewhat. Especially when Sitnalta gave me a duplicate of her Vision-Audition Sphere, and said that it was tuned into constant contact with her—as though it were a telephone or a radio set.

But I took it, and all three of us went out to the curb where I had first entered the Aero-Sphere. The Aero-Sphere of these two came rolling up, as before, and they stepped into it. But I was bidden to remain on the curb, to my amazement and befuddlement. I had not long to wait before I found out, however, for right behind the Aero-Sphere came a vehicle that looked exactly like it, with one important difference—only half of it was in use, and that the bottom half! And the thing had soft wheels of some sort, and the seats were swung in the body of the lower half of the sphere. The top half was missing, thus making the “car” an open one.

Sitnalta’s voice came to me through the Vision-Audition Sphere, and there was laughter in it:

“Your triumphal chariot, Gregg Pettis! You are now about to make a journey through the City of the Golden Gate!”

I waited a moment longer, then stepped into the car. And again, through the Sphere I heard the voice of Sitnalta, saying:

“Oh, people of the City of the Golden Gate, hear now the voice of Sitnalta, sister of the Chief of Scientists! An outlander, after all these centuries, has successfully passed the tests—and is now accepted as Ambassador from Outside to His Majesty Poseidon, King of Atlantis! See that all honor be done him! Hail to his name, which is Gregg Pettis! Gregg Pettis, Gregg Pettis. Say it over again—Gregg Pettis! —until you know it and can shout it!”

Startled, I looked away toward the streets of the city, and saw it begin to fill with people, hundreds and thousands of them. Before I could make up my mind what was really going to happen, the sidewalks were packed with Atlanteans, and I knew that all along the streets there would be others, on the way to the palace of Poseidon.

Then I looked down in dismay at my black shirt, none too clean, at my blue denim jeans, faded and also none too clean, and wished that I could crawl into the Great Bore and lose myself.

“Sitnalta!” I yelled at the Sphere. “I can’t show myself in clothes like these!”

She laughed gleefully.

"Having nothing fit to wear is the sole prerogative of women, Gregg Pettis," she said. "You'll have to do with what you've got. There is method in our madness, though. It must be logical that if we can get our people to accept even a *horrible example* like yourself, they will most certainly accept even the least of your countrymen!"

Yes, they had a sense of humor, and I had to take it.

Yes, when I had thought Naeco a cold man and that *all* his people disliked him, I had been entirely wrong. Certain nobles did hate him—for good reason; but not for the reason I had originally thought.

THE Aero-Sphere of Naeco and Sitnalta rose to about twenty feet into the air, and Sitnalta spoke again:

"We have no desire to share your glory," she said. "We leave the triumphal car entirely to you."

The Aero-Sphere began to move away, maintaining that twenty-foot altitude, and with the successive "suns" of Atlantis shining on it it was beautiful.

My own "car" began to crawl along, behind and below, away from the laboratory, toward one of the streets of Atlantis. I could see the street opening for me as if it had been a mouth to devour me. And my courage ebbed away to zero. If ever a bum had been honored, I was that bum! I couldn't have looked worse, or been more conspicuous.

We came to the first of the people, and but for their clothes I might have thought myself Lindbergh, receiving the plaudits of New York, after flying the Atlantic—*after receiving the key of the city from the Mayor*.

There was no ticker tape, but the people looked as though they would have thrown it if they had had any.

Men dressed in tights, green, which made me think of Robin Hood, because of their straightness and their height, waved at me and shouted, their lips split with grins of delight!

"Gregg Pettis! Gregg Pettis!"

And then, after I had acknowledged their shouts, they added:

"Who makes your clothes?"

I might have known it would come to that, but I had started something I could not escape. These people, mind you, were not people from another planet, but people exactly like people I had seen by the thousands in New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago. They were jolly men, and the saucily-dressed women who hung on their arms had just as much fun as their husbands and sweethearts did.

I was being tested again. If I could take it, I would be taken to their

hearts, something that to me became vastly desirable—and became more and more so as the City of the Golden Gate grew on me. How to describe it. Take the widest streets of all the cities you know, and lump them together in one—and you have the streets of Atlantis. Take the grass, and tint it purple, along the sidewalks of such cities as go in for beautification, and place it between the sidewalks and the buildings, and you have a bit more of that amazing city.

Take the most beautiful cathedrals you have ever seen, actually or in pictures, and scatter them in one city—and use them as places of business, and you have the commercial section of the City of the Golden Gate.

Take all the skyscrapers you have ever seen, and only the highest ones, and the most beautiful, tint them with the glory of the sun and the rainbow—and multiply them by hundreds, and you have the towering structures which are Atlantis.

Then, the widest streets, with two-way traffic—except that none were on them but myself—monarch of all I surveyed—and the City of the Golden Gate will begin to grow into a reality for two.

Take Boston Commons and make it truly beautiful, like a spring morning, and you have the parks and the squares and the commons of Atlantis.

Take the great triumphal arches of Europe and throw them across the streets, and you have an even clearer picture.

Take the Colossus of Rhodes, and multiply it by many, and you will have the statues of the great ones of Atlantis.

Fill the canyons of your greatest city with countless Aero-Spheres, which cannot collide with one another, no matter how fast they travel, because each repels all others, and you can imagine what beauty their traffic adds to your city—and you will know still more about Atlantis.

And then, tune in on what the people shouted to me as, slowly—and Naeco and Sitnalta traveled slowly, that I should miss nothing of it all! —the Aero-Sphere led the way for me through the city:

“ARE you the handsomest man in your country?”

A girl who looked to be about nineteen shouted that at me, and I would have shouted back at her, except that I was already so lacking in dignity—what with my black shirt and my jeans—that I didn’t care. There should be nothing rowdy about this.

“Gregg Pettis! Gregg Pettis!”

I confess I liked to hear my name shouted. I felt as though I had conquered a foreign foe for these people, and that by so doing I had become one of them.

“What do you wear on your head, Gregg Pettis, wherever you come from?”

There it was. Just like other people, except that they spoke ancient Greek and didn’t have much respect in the main for “personages.” Not that, in that impossible get-up of mine, I looked anything but what I was a thirty-second assistant to the boss of a gang of super-sandhogs.

“Stand up, Gregg Pettis, and let us get a good look at you!”

I did it, too, much as I hated to. They were not making fun of me, I realized but having fun *with* me. They were happy to have me, and when I knew that, I felt like bursting with song—which doubtless would have been the last straw.

The Aero-Sphere traveled slowly, more slowly.

The crowds on either hand became more joyous, more riotous. Sitnalta, entering into the spirit of the crowd, was telling them about me, as though I had been a piece of the landscape, and she a barker in a sight-seeing bus.

“If you’re not close enough to see,” she said, “his hair is brown and his eyes are blue. He is six feet tall, and thinks well of himself!”

I let it go on until I could stand no more. Humor, I realized, was almost the music of Atlantis, and this was the way I entered into the city—as though behind a band.

Ribbons of stuff like paper began to drift down from the high windows too, and again I asked myself:

“Is there anything new under the sun? In how many ages has Lindbergh flown the ocean? And in how many lives has he been received like this?”

Not, understand, that I compared myself with Lindbergh, but only that my reception was as great as that which had been accorded him.

I spoke into the Vision-Audition Sphere.

“Just wait, Sitnalta,” I said.

“Wait? For what, Gregg Pettis?”

“Until I get you on Fifth Avenue, the first time! My people will show you what a reception is *really* like!”

I should have been listening instead of talking too much, for after that the reception sort of got out of hand. Ahead of me was a gauntlet I was becoming afraid of, behind me was a shambles. For the people whom I passed fell in behind me, and followed after, shouting my name. And when I was in the midst of the city, this was what they added to my name:

“*Deliverer! Gregg Pettis, Deliverer of Atlantis!*” So there were those who realized how much my success meant!

AFTER a while, when the din of it began to get on my nerves, I spoke to Sitnalta.

"Can't we speed up a bit, or can't I take this car off and fly it? I don't rate all this, and it's abashing me!"

Her laughter was a delight to hear; I apologized immediately, so that they could have their fun. After all, they had waited centuries for this, and I was only, really, the symbol of their deliverance.

Later though, I thought of Rogers McLeod, in the Giant Mole, and that I must get back to him as soon as possible, and said as much to Sitnalta.

"Has he no means of communication in the Giant Mole?" she asked. "Yes. He has a telephone."

She understood the word, because of its derivation—and at once she told me how to "tune in" the Vision-Audition Sphere. Eagerly, my hands trembling, I spoke the number of his telephone into the Sphere—and to my ears came the voice of Rogers McLeod.

"Boss," I said, "don't be scared. This is Gregg Pettis, and what I've got to tell you! I'm no ghost, but just as I was when I was snatched. Don't ask for explanations, simply take my word that I'm all right, and I will be with you soon!"

He exploded, and I tuned him out, lest what he said offend the ears of Sitnalta, who might or might not have tuned in on him at the same time.

And so the parade continued; until finally, how much later I had no way of knowing, it ended before the doors of the palace of Poseidon.

This time I walked on the runner of state, in all my black-shirt, blue-jeans glory, right into the presence of Poseidon—who roared with laughter as he saw me, and said:

"Welcome, Ambassador Gregg Pettis, to this court! Now, what would you suggest we do about relations between Atlantis and the barbaric place you came from?"

"First," I said, "let's have something to eat and drink. Before we do, however, I'd like to ask a promise from you."

"Anything you want within reason, is yours," said Poseidon.

"Good. Send me back to the Giant Mole, to my boss. From there I'll go back to my people to report Atlantis re-discovered. But I must have proof; therefore I ask for two ambassadors."

I looked grimly at Naeco and Sitnalta.

"Send back with me, Sire," I said, "Sitnalta and Naeco, dressed in their most ornate robes of state."

"But why?"

"I want Fifth Avenue to get a load of them!" I said.

And with both Naeco and Sitnalta glaring at me, we all went in to dinner—and I very carefully refrained from asking what the *piece de resistance* was!

THERE isn't much more to tell. Naeco and Sitnalta went back into the Giant Mole with me, after we'd stopped it again, and returned as I had left, except that now there were two more of us.

We explained everything, and McLeod and the super-sandhogs accepted the whole thing as calmly as the world accepted radio, airplanes and fire-engines.

I took those two to Washington, then to New York—and what a reception they got! And the conferences with our scientists—it won't be long now before the first flight to the moon is attempted.

They were the best possible salesmen of Atlantis. And that's why, now that the Great Bore is finished, there is a "wide place in the road" under Atlantis, at exactly the place where I was first "kidnapped," and that at this wide place the Bore cuts two ways around a vast column of seemingly solid rock.

Only the rock isn't solid, but is filled with banks of elevators—and all tickets to Europe from the United States, and vice versa, provide for stop-overs at Atlantis, at no extra cost! Folk of Atlantis are entitled to travel outward from Atlantis, at no cost to themselves. But, being good tradesmen, we Americans and Europeans, we charge them double when they want to go home!

THE END

HOLLOW EARTH TALES

	<p>VOLUME 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Plunge of the “Knupfen” by <i>Leonard Grover</i> – The Smoky God by <i>Willis George Emerson</i> – The Annihilator Comes by <i>Ed Earl Repp</i> – The Strange Voyage of Dr. Penwing by <i>Richard O. Lewis</i> – The Hollow Planet by <i>Don Wilcox</i> – The Voice from the Inner World by <i>A. Hyatt Verrill</i> – The Underground City by <i>Bertrand L. Shurtleff</i> 		<p>VOLUME 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A Subterranean Adventure by <i>George Paul Bauer</i> – The Eye of Balamok by <i>Victor Rousseau</i> – Death Dives Deep by <i>Paul Ernst</i> – The Incredible Theory of Dr. Penwing by <i>Richard O. Lewis</i>
	<p>VOLUME 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Hidden World by <i>Edmond Hamilton</i> – The Inner World by <i>A. Hyatt Verrill</i> – Enchantress of Lemuria by <i>Stanton A. Coblentz</i> 		<p>VOLUME 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Luvium by <i>A. R. McKenzie</i> – Luvium, Under the Sand by <i>A. R. McKenzie</i> – Luvium, The Invincible City by <i>A. R. McKenzie</i> – The Far Detour by <i>Arthur J. Burks</i> – The Valley of Titans by <i>L. A. Eshbach</i>
	<p>VOLUME 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Troglydotes by <i>Fred M. Barclay</i> – The Tomb of Time by <i>Richard Tooker</i> – The Land of the Changing Sun by <i>William N. Harben</i> 		<p>VOLUME 6: Coming Soon!</p>

THE TROGLODYTES

By Fred M. Barclay



AUTHOR'S NOTE

*I*N placing this narrative on record I take no responsibility for the observations of the man who related it, for he admitted that both he and his two companions were men of poor education, having no scientific training, although one of them seems to have had some small smattering of science such as "the man in the street" acquires from the Sunday magazine sections of the newspapers and the tid-bits of science to be found in the popular magazines.

Where his observations are not in accord with the theories of scientists, who shall say whether he or the scientists are wrong? For there remains the possibility of unsuspected factors, which, although resulting in phenomena that would warrant the conclusions of science, yet not being considered in their calculations would inevitably lead to a false conclusion.

As these observations are not my own, I positively refuse to become involved in any possible controversy that may arise from their publication, but if it results in correcting theories which may be false, and leading scientific thought into a new and truer channel, then Joe Everett's months of painful experience may not have been in vain.

De Profundis

IT was a hot afternoon in late September, and I was mowing the lawn for what I hoped would be the last time for the season. I stopped to rest for a moment and it was then that I saw him first; he was coming up out of the bushes from the river bank on the other side of the road. It was the manner of his coming that first arrested my attention. He was crawling on hands and knees, then he got erect and came staggering up the road toward me, holding both hands over his eyes. I gave a tentative push on the handle bars of the lawn mower, with the intention of finishing the few swathes that remained, when I saw him stagger more and suddenly fall in the middle of the road.

Drunk or not drunk, I couldn't let him stay there. Some reckless driver might come along and I should never forgive myself if anything serious happened.

I stood the lawn mower against the fence and walked leisurely down the road toward him. Leaning down, I took him by the arm and gave him a shake.

"Here," I said, "this won't do, you know; you can't go to sleep in the middle of the road; you will be run over. Come on, let's go over to the grass at the side; you'll be safe there."

I helped him to his feet and found that he was quite wet; evidently he had been in the river; that should have sobered him up. It was then that I got a

good look at him. A man of good physique, but of a sickly pallor, not overly tall, but wearing next to nothing in the way of clothes; a very ragged shirt and a pair of pants, that were covered with mud through scrambling up the river bank, comprised his wardrobe. There was nothing left of the pants below the knees. He was barefooted and had a bushy, matted beard, while his hair hung, wet and straggling, upon his shoulders.

When he was on his feet, he made no attempt to move, but stood still with both hands over his eyes.

"Come on, Rip Van Winkle," I said. "Lie down in the shade of the bushes just off the road; you'll be able to sleep it off in safety there."

"Shade!" he said, speaking for the first time. His voice was very husky. "It's more than shade I want. If you could put me in a place where it's quite dark, out of this terrible sunlight, perhaps my eyes would get better and I should be able to see."

I was rather surprised at his voice. It didn't sound as if he were drunk. Still the alcohol that was being peddled these days often affected the optic nerves; many people became quite blind in fact. I relented somewhat.

"Here, come on," I said. "I'll let you stay in my garage for a time."

"Thanks," he replied. "It's good to feel the warmth of sunshine, but it's too dazzlingly bright for my eyes after being in the dark so long."

"You shouldn't have stayed in the dark so long," I said, thinking that I was humoring him. "How long were you in the dark?"

"What date is this?" he asked.

"This is September twenty-six, nineteen twenty-nine."

"Then it must be that I was underground among those horrors for nearly three years, for it was in November, nineteen twenty-six, that we discovered the cave."

"Well," I said, "here's the garage; make yourself at home. I'll close the door and I guess I can find something to put over the window."

When I had done that, he very carefully took his hands away from his eyes. It was then I saw how very bad they were. Tears were rolling down his cheeks just as they do from the eyes of a person who has very weak eyes. Obviously, he was not drunk at all.

"I beg your pardon," I said. "I believe I have been making a mistake about you."

"I believe you have. But, under the circumstances, the mistake was very natural. You thought that I had been drinking. Yet, though I have touched nothing in the way of hard liquor for many a month, I have seen things that no man would expect to see except in the horrors of drink. When I said that I was underground for nearly three years, I was stating an absolute fact. It is

nearly three years since I saw the light of day, and now I can't bear to look at it. But I suppose my eyes will become normal again after a time."

"Now, see here," I said, "you stay here till I can fix you up. You are hardly presentable in your present shape. Then, if you want to, you can tell me of your adventures."

My wife met me at the doorway. "Listen to me, William" —when she calls me William, I know she's really angry— "you can't let that drunken tramp stay in the garage."

"My dear, you do the poor fellow an injustice. He's not drunk; he's just come through some terrible experience and is almost blind. It's my intention to help the poor fellow. So, if you will get me a bath towel and your shears while I find some clothes, we'll do the best we can for him. And I wish you'd rush supper along and plenty of it."

An appeal to her sympathies is nearly always successful. So, somewhat mollified, she said, "I wish you'd quit bringing all kinds of tramps here. Before long, this place will be like a county poor farm."

As I was about to leave the house, with my arms full of clothes, she handed me a large towel and the shears and said, "You had better take this along too," whereupon she thrust into my hands a large surgical bandage. "It may be useful for his eyes. Supper will be ready in about half an hour."

The man clapped his hands over his eyes as soon as I opened the door of the garage, although when the door was closed, he seemed fairly comfortable in the dim light in which I could hardly find my way about.

He set to work with the razor I had brought and removed the rough beard. Then with the water from the faucet he quickly cleaned up, then dressed himself. While he held the bandage over his eyes, I took the covering from the window, then trimmed off the worst of his shaggy hair.

By the time we had finished, my wife was calling, "Supper is ready." So, we went across the yard to the house. Although the sun had set, I noticed that he still held the bandage over his eyes but removed it as we entered the dining-room, where my wife had considerably drawn the blinds.

The man ate slowly and with evident relish and at last said, with a sigh of repletion, "That is the first Christian food I have eaten in nearly three years, and I can't begin to tell you how good it feels. It's at such a time as this that a man appreciates good food and especially your good cooking, ma'am."

"Thanks, Mr.—er—" said my wife rather dryly.

"Everett is the name, ma'am; Joe Everett."

"Hamilton is ours," I responded. "Do you smoke, Mr. Everett?"

"That would be the very crown of your kindness, Mr. Hamilton, for I have missed tobacco more than I have missed anything."

I pushed the cigarettes across to him and struck a match, but he covered his eyes again at the flare.

Just then a hearty voice was heard outside. "Hello! what's the matter with the light; trying to economize?"

"Come in, Dad," my wife called, and led the old gentleman into the dining-room. "This is Mr. Everett," she continued. "Mr. Everett has been through some terrible experience underground, and even the smallest amount of light seems to be too much for his eyes, so we were sitting in the dark. I think Mr. Everett was just going to tell us about it."

I don't know whether Mr. Everett had any such intention, but my wife's curiosity was getting the better of her.

"Ah! you're a miner, Mr. Everett?" asked the old gentleman. "An explosion, I suppose?"

"No, sir, I am not a miner; neither was it an explosion that caused the trouble. My eyes cannot bear the light because I have been underground for nearly three years and, for the greater part of that time, in complete darkness."

"Were you alone, Mr. Everett?"

"No, sir, but I wish that I had been, rather than with the things that were there, and to see my two companions horribly destroyed as they were. I scarcely like to tell about it because I know that it will sound incredible.

"I shall not feel hurt if you express your unbelief."

"I have seen some queer things myself in my studies," said the old gentleman.

"Professor Small is a paleontologist," I explained.

"I don't know what that is," said Mr. Everett, "but if it will help him to understand, so much the better. But I'll tell you the story from the beginning.

The Finding of the Cave

IWORKED a good many miles north of here in the summer of nineteen twenty-six. I was engaged in concrete construction. Working with me were two other men, very close friends of mine, John Bowers and Jim House. That line of business is limited to the summer months, so the pay is very high during the season. Toward the middle of September, we began to discuss what we should do during the winter months. We were all agreed that it would be rather nice to spend the winter in the South, but railroad fares eat into one's savings so badly that it did not seem quite feasible.

"One day John Bowers suggested that we pool our money and build a cabin boat in which to go down the river. About the beginning of October, we began to have lay-off days on account of frost, for even October cold was too much for concrete, so we decided to quit the job and start work on the

boat. Being good mechanics, it did not take us long to build a boat that was large enough to accommodate three men very comfortably.

"We came down the river very leisurely, for we knew that we were well ahead of the freeze-up; between fishing and hunting and playing cards in the evenings, we had a very enjoyable time. Sometimes we would lay over near a river town; get in fresh supplies; go to a show; buy a few books and magazines, then drift on again. We hadn't a care in the world.

"One evening we tied up under some tall bluffs—they can't be very far up river from here, because I came out of the same hole today and floated down on the current this far. I noticed, as we came along, a place where a stream of clear, sparkling water came out of a hole under the bluffs. Now the river water, as you know, is not very good unless it is filtered. So, when we had tied up, I went back along the shore with a couple of buckets to get some water from the spring. When I got there, I found that one could crawl in a considerable distance under the bluffs, which I did, but had to stop when I got beyond where the light penetrated. I told the other fellows about it on my return with the water and John Bowers said, 'All right, boys, since we have nothing to do but kill time, let's explore that cave in the morning. Maybe we'll find something interesting.' "

"Excuse me," interrupted Professor Small, "what was the name of your boat?"

"*The Three Jays* was what we called it, sir, and the name was painted on the bow. You see, poor Jim House was something of a joker, and one day he said, 'We'll name this boat very appropriately for our initials—*The Three Jays*—it fits exactly, for if there ever was a jay trick, it's this one of starting in a Noah's Ark outfit like this.' "

"Ah!" said the professor, "that's one item of circumstantial evidence, whatever your story is, for your boat *The Three Jays*, is lying down at the lower edge of town now. It was only yesterday that I was wondering what mystery was connected with it. You will remember. William," he said, turning to me, "that in the early part of the winter of twenty-six the river froze over rather early and then the ice broke up again. In the run of ice this boat was brought down and pushed well up on shore at the bend just below town. No one ever claimed it, so the marshal took charge of it. That must be the boat in which Mr. Everett and his friends came down the river. But please go on, Mr. Everett."

"The next morning, we started out, each carrying an electric flashlight. We crawled into the hole for some distance; then as the roof got higher, we were able to walk. We continued on for a long distance, the cave spreading out all the way, until we came to a blank wall of rock. The little stream was

on our left, but at that point it came out of a small hole that was not much larger than enough to carry its volume of water.

“John Bowers picked up a loose rock and began knocking on the wall. ‘Sounds hollow,’ he said. Then he noticed a hole in the wall, not much larger than a man could get his head through. He pushed his flashlight through and looked in. ‘That’s some cave,’ he said. We all looked in and I think I had never seen a cave anywhere larger than that one. We tried to pull some of the rocks away so that we could get in, but having only put bare hands to work with, we had to give it up.

“ ‘Seeing that we have all the time in the world,’ said John, ‘I think we might find out how big that cave is.’

“We returned to our boat and, taking our skiff, pulled up the river to a small town we had passed the day before. There we bought some dynamite and candles and, seeing a box of chalk such as is used in schools, John bought that as well. ‘For,’ he said, ‘there’s no knowing how many passages and tunnels there may be in there, and we don’t want to get lost. So, we’ll put a mark on the rocks wherever we make a turn.’

“We returned to the cave and, setting the dynamite to the best advantage with a long fuse, we dashed out to the boat and pulled out on the river. We had not long to wait before we heard the explosion. Then, while the gas was clearing away, we returned to the cabin boat and prepared for the expedition. We put up a package of lunch at John’s suggestion. He seemed to have more forethought than we other two, and, although he was a much older man he was just as keen as Jim and I for anything like adventure.

“ ‘There’s no knowing how far we may be able to go underground,’ he said, ‘and I don’t want to have to come back before we get to the end just because we haven’t got something that we didn’t think of.’

“Jim suggested that we carry our guns—we each had a shotgun for hunting—but John said that he thought they would be rather in the way. He did agree, however, that I should carry a thirty-eight-caliber revolver which I had, as there might be a few bad snakes. That was the only thing he expected to encounter. How far out he was in his guess you shall soon hear.

“WE found that the dynamite had done a very satisfactory job, so that we were able to scramble over the loose rocks, directly into the big cave, without further trouble. We each carried candles; as the light from those was rather feeble, we also carried our electric flashlights. With these we were able to throw powerful beams of light around the cave. It was immense. The roof was at least thirty to forty feet above our heads where we stood, and our powerful lights seemed only just to penetrate to the walls on

either side. There was a constant drip of water from the roof, from which depended long, slender, cone-shaped points of rock, and the floor was very rough. In one or two places there were pillars of rock that seemed to be helping to support the roof; they were slender in the middle but spread out where they joined the floor and roof. John said that they were stalactites and stalagmites that had become united and gave us a short account of their formation. You see, he had spent a good many of his winters around the public libraries, so that he was much better informed than we were.

"There were quite a number of snakes twined in bunches on the ledges of the walls—just the common sorts that we were used to—but being so near winter, they seemed to be half torpid, so that we had no trouble with them. Our lights disturbed quite a number of bats, which swung about in a panicky manner near the roof. We went forward to the far end of the cave. There the roof dipped down and the walls drew inward until we were in a place where the roof was not more than ten feet above our heads and the walls not more than six feet apart. There did not seem to be much of interest, except the tremendous size of the cave.

"The small tunnel-like opening seemed to contract more further on, but as we could not see the end John was all for going on. Here the floor dipped downward at a sharp angle. We came presently to another wall of rock, but saw that there were tunnels leading off to each side. We tossed up a coin to decide which we should take, and then John placed the first of his chalk marks—an arrow—and called our attention to the way he was placing them, always to the right hand and pointing to the way we came in. I am glad that he made that definite system, because it saved me many precious minutes later. And upon those minutes my life depended.

"We went on through tunnel after tunnel and cave after cave, some large, some small, until I was beginning to feel rather tired. All the way we had been going steeply downhill, but there did not seem to be anything of interest. We had used up quite a number of candles when, as we were going through an extra-long tunnel, Jim looked at his watch and exclaimed, 'Do you fellows realize how long we have been down here? It's just six hours since we left daylight.'

" 'I didn't think it was so long as that,' said John. 'We'll go on to the next cave, and if we see nothing more interesting than we have seen, we'll eat lunch and return.'

"But the next cave was not the last that we saw that day. When we entered it and turned on our torches, we met a sight that nearly dazzled us. There were pillars and stalactites and stalagmites and beautiful fretted designs along the walls and roof, all of some crystalline formation, that flashed back

our lights at us in a myriad of colors. There seemed to be lights flashing from the recesses where the lights of our torches did not penetrate. It was a perfect wonderland of rainbow hues. Jim thought that we had entered a cave of diamonds and that our fortunes were made, but John told him that it was not diamond, that the rocks were of some sort of crystal that grows with natural smooth facets, which, being superimposed on one another, reflected our lights in many colors.

“We ate our lunch in that cave and tried to estimate the distance we had come. John thought that we were at least five or six miles from where we had entered and from two to three miles below the surface—deeper, he suggested, than any man had been before, and wished that we had some means of making a true estimate. It was quite hot there, so that we had long since taken off our coats. I was about to throw away the remains of my lunch, for we had brought along twice as much as we needed, when John stopped me.

“‘Better keep it, Joe,’ he said, ‘we may need it before we get back, for now that we have got to where there is something worth seeing, I propose that we go on further. Time means nothing to us, now that we are not working.’

“The crystalline formation seemed to predominate in the next two or three caves. We continued to descend at a steep gradient. Presently we came to a cave where there was a vegetable growth. In form it was not unlike rhubarb: a thick, juicy stem, with a single large leaf at the top. It was all of six feet in height, but it had no color, unless you could call a dirty light gray a color. We heard the scurrying of some small animal among the thick stems and there was a smell of decayed vegetation, while the atmosphere was more humid than in any of the caves, we had passed through except those near the surface.

“For several caves these growths continued. Then we came to something that was different; it looked like celery, both the stems and the leaves being almost white. Again, there was a change in the vegetation. We came into a cave where there was nothing but fungoid growth of a pallid color, slightly tinged with yellow. I was very much surprised to find anything in the nature of vegetation so far underground, but Jim said that it did not surprise him very much, for he had heard of such things as mushrooms and rhubarb being cultivated in coal mines and there were possibly other things that could be made to grow under similar conditions.

Fight in the Dark

JOHN was just remarking that these things seemed to grow as if they had been cultivated, for they were in regular rows, and each cave seemed to be relegated to one sort of plant life, while the soil had the appearance of being tilled. Suddenly Jim stopped and said in a husky whisper, ‘Listen!’ We

stopped. Then we heard it—a sort of rustling, clicking sound. It seemed to be behind us. I turned quickly, snatched my torch from my belt and switched it on in one motion. There, in the direction from which we had come, were two points of greenish light; below them was a pale pinkish sheen. I snatched out my gun and fired, but the thing had disappeared in a niche. The only effect that the shot seemed to have was to send echoes roaring through the caverns and to bring down a number of stalactites from the roof. Fortunately, none of them struck us. We started running toward the spot where the thing had disappeared, John advising me to be more careful with the gun, as we might do ourselves more harm than good.

“Again, we heard that clicking, rustling noise following us. We turned quickly with our torches, and there they were, at least a dozen of the queerest beings that anyone has ever seen. As the light of our torches struck them, they covered their eyes with their hands, and, in a crouching attitude, turned their backs upon us and ran. Jim was facing the other way when he called out, ‘Look out! there’s another bunch of them coming from this side.’ Then there came a sound like a light puff-f-f, and all our lights went out together. We three were standing back to back when I saw those luminous, greenish spots approaching us again. As I pulled the trigger, John called ‘Look out!’ as we heard an ominous cracking above us. We each leaped forward instinctively in the direction that each was facing, which drew us all apart; a stalactite fell from the roof directly on the spot where we had been standing; then they were upon us in the darkness. We fought, I with the butt of the revolver for a time, until it was knocked out of my hand; then with my fists, striking out in all directions in the darkness. Sometimes there was nothing there and my arm would feel as if it were dislocated; then again I would land on something hard, yet yielding. But every time I landed; I could feel that my knuckles were being skinned by something sharp. At last they swarmed upon me and pulled me down. I could hear the sound of a struggle going on to one side of me for some time and then came silence. I think Jim was the last to be overpowered. Then I heard John’s voice at some distance. ‘Oh, Joe—Jim! they’ve got me. Are you all right?’

“ ‘They’ve got me too, John,’ I called, ‘otherwise I’m all right.’

“Then we heard Jim’s voice and there was a lilt in it as if he had had a good deal of enjoyment. ‘I guess they’ve got the bunch of us,’ he called, ‘but some of them will know they’ve been in a scrap. What the dickens are they, John?’ ”

* * *

Here Mrs. Hamilton’s curiosity got the better of her, for she asked with a quiver of excitement in her voice, “But what did they look like, Mr. Everett?”

“Now, ma’am, this is one of the things that no one will want to believe.”

Professor Small leaned forward very intently as if he did not want to miss a word.

“They were men and women, yet they were unlike anything in the shape of men and women that I had ever heard of. They were tall, taller than the average, and their bodies were very large, both broad and long, while their legs were short. They carried themselves in a slightly stooping attitude, although their heads were erect. Their arms seemed to be of a proper proportion and well developed. But they were covered from head to foot with scales—scales like a fish or a snake—if you can imagine a person covered with finger-nails, overlapping one another in regular rows, you will get a fair idea. But these scales were hard and horny, of a pinkish tint, just like a good healthy finger-nail should be. It was these scales that were cutting our hands to pieces while we were fighting them. Their faces were not bad to look at, more or less like the average human face, except that their lower jaws jutted out rather far, something like the jaws of the big apes that I have seen in shows.”

“Prognathous!” muttered the Professor.

“But their noses were not like those of apes—short and wide. Some of them were straight and some were more of the Roman type. Their mouths were well shaped, although, on account of the jutting lower jaw, rather far forward; their eyes were unusually large and round and their foreheads were straight and high, not sloping as you would expect from the shape of the jaws. Their faces were bare of scales and the skin was smooth and very white, as were the undersides of their arms and the palms of their hands. There was no hair upon their heads, but a sort of bony or shell-like cap, which ended in a thick upward curved roll at the base of the skull and on the forehead a slight protuberance like an embryo horn. We thought at first that it was some sort of cap or helmet that they were wearing, but discovered later that it was a natural growth of a light brown horny substance. Of course, we didn’t notice all of this at the time of our first encounter, but we had plenty of opportunity later.

“They dragged us to our feet. Then the three groups drew together, holding us in as prisoners. For a time, they conferred in a language of which we could not understand a word; then taking us by our arms, they moved off in the darkness. They could see as well in the dark as we could in the light. All that we could see was the luminous gleam of their eyes, as first one then another turned toward us.

“Jim and I seemed naturally to turn to John for advice. We asked what he thought of our situation, but he said that it was of no use to speculate, for this was quite wide of all previous experience. He thought that our captors

were intelligent and in some sort human; he didn't think they intended us any harm, judging by the careful way they had handled us, for even in the fight they seemed to be careful not to hurt us. He advised us not to resist them any more until we saw that they intended to harm us, for they might possibly turn us loose after they had satisfied their curiosity, for they were evidently as curious about us as we were about them. 'Anyway, whatever happens,' he said, 'it's all in a lifetime.' After which philosophic remark we marched on in the midst of our captors in silence.

"After a time, they stopped, and I knew by the lift on my arms that I was to step up. Then came a gentle pressure on my shoulders when I sat down with one of my captors on each side of me. In a moment I felt motion and knew that I was on some sort of machine; it gathered speed rapidly and, judging by the way the air rushed past us, and later when we went through a place where there was a slight luminosity in the walls, the pace must have been tremendous.

"We seemed to have been an hour or two on that machine—time enough, with the pace we were going, I thought, to have got half way round the world—but there were times when I got the sensation of falling, such as one gets in a rapidly descending elevator. Our course was far from straight, for I had felt the sway of the machine as we made turns at tremendous speed, first to one side then the other, and I think I should have been thrown off many times if my captors had not held on to me.

Home of the Ampu

"**A**T last the car slowed up and stopped in a very large vaulted cavern where there was a slight luminous glow that was not any stronger than a clear, starlight, moonless night. In fact, it had much of that quality, but even in that dim light we could see that the pupils of our attendants' eyes were contracted to mere slits, although the light did not seem to bother them as had the lights of our candles, to say nothing of the light of our electric torches. Our own eyes were becoming accustomed to the dim light, so that we were able to see what was going on around us fairly well.

They swarmed about us in hundreds, a rather apathetic crowd, I thought, of young and old together. It was the first time I was ever exhibited as a natural curiosity, and Jim, the irresponsible, at once began a facetious circus ballyhoo which made John laugh outright in spite of our predicament. But there was no sympathetic response from the crowd.

"It was a weird feeling to be standing there in that dim light with those innumerable, gleaming eyes staring at us and see the glistening sheen of their bodies as they moved about, but it was some satisfaction to feel, as they came in contact with us, that there was a natural warmth in their

bodies. Had they been cold or clammy, I think horror would have taken possession of us.

"Their languid curiosity soon evaporated, so that they dispersed and went about whatever duties they had, leaving us very much alone. It was not until Jim said, 'I wonder if they are going to give us any eats,' that John and I felt the pangs of hunger.

" 'Let's try to get something, anyway,' said John. But how to go about it we did not know. Then an idea occurred to him; he drew a piece of chalk from his pocket, and catching one of our captors by the arm, drew him over to a blank wall space and commenced drawing the picture of a man which, although rather crude, was good enough to represent one of us. Opposite that he drew a representation of one of our captors—imitating the scales and the curious headpiece rather well—presenting a large dish to the human figure. There was a representation of smoke or steam issuing from the dish. The creature looked at the picture for a moment, then nodded his head as if in comprehension. He said something to some of the others, who immediately departed and soon returned with steaming dishes of food.

" 'Got it the first time,' said Jim. 'That guy must be a scientist; guard that lump of chalk with your life, John.'

" 'At any rate, they understand art,' said John with a smug grin.

"There was a very dark-looking piece of meat in the dish about which we were very doubtful. However, we could not afford to be too squeamish. Then, in a pasty substance we got the flavor of boiled chestnuts, and that was the best we got to eat all the time we were there. The other things were more or less insipid, but they were edible and would stave off the pangs of hunger.

"After we had eaten, we saw that everyone was climbing into horizontal niches in the rocky walls. Presently the person who had procured our supper came over and, taking John by the arm, led him to one of the hollow places and indicated that he should enter. This person seemed to take charge of us from that time on. He must have been proud of the fact that he had been the first to communicate with us intelligently.

" 'Sleeping compartment!' said John, and we saw that there was ample room for the three of us and that the floor of the niche was covered deeply with some sort of fabric, the first that we had seen. Clothing was quite unnecessary in that warm climate. Jim took the fabric between his finger and thumb to find out what it was. 'If that isn't silk,' he remarked, 'I've never worn a silk shirt in my life; but it's the thickest I've ever encountered.'

"Although we were very tired, we lay there discussing our position for some time until the dim light faded and thick, black darkness ensued. John's

last remark, just before I dropped off into deep sleep, was: 'It's no use to think of getting back unless they are willing to take us, for, judging by the length of time it took and the speed with which we came, we are probably four or five hundred miles from the river and at least half of that is straight down. We may as well see all we can about these queer creatures, so long as they treat us decently, and then we will find means and opportunity for getting back.'

"When we woke, we found that the dim light was shining again and our friend, the provider of supper, was waiting for us. He beckoned us toward an archway that led into a cave at right angles to the one we were in. Others were going in there, but as they entered they paused and, looking up, brought both hands above their heads, then slowly lowered them to their sides in the form of a complete circle, following that with a very low and, apparently, reverent bow. Looking up to the center of the arch, we saw a strange figure. There were eight slightly luminous balls revolving on two different orbits, four to each orbit, the orbits crossing each other at top and bottom, but equidistant at their equators. The strangest part of it was that the thing hung there in a position opposite to the central point of the arch, but without visible support. In fact, so far as I could see, a tangible support would have been impossible to have allowed freedom for the revolution of its two orbits, which were at right angles to each other.

"As we approached, John said, 'Whatever that thing is, they think an awful lot of it, and we'd better do the same as they are doing.' Turning to Jim, he said, 'And for heaven's sake, take that grin off your face, Jim. This is serious business, and we don't want to offend them by any appearance of levity.'

"Our guide seemed pleased when he saw us make the salute and then took us over to a raised stone table-like arrangement on which were several dishes of raw food. We saw that each different sort of food was on a different kind of metal platter, and behind the table was a moving belt containing a number of dishes. As we took what looked best to us, there immediately slid from the belt a similar platter, containing the same sort of food, into the place which we had made vacant. We were curious enough to watch the machine while others came and took what they needed, but the machine never made a mistake. Always the same sort of platter, containing the same sort of food, in the same place. Yet there were a variety of platters passing on the belt. 'Must be selective magnetism,' suggested John.

" 'It's a nifty idea for a cafeteria,' said Jim.

"There were quite a number of the creatures in this cave, engaged in preparing the food. Our guide began to show us the process, when one of the females came forward to help. When she had performed some mixing

process with the food, she opened a door which we found was some sort of oven, and although there was no light visible, there was plenty of heat. These ovens were ranged all along the walls; hundreds of them, and as the food did not seem to take long to cook, there seemed to be no waiting. We sat down to long stone tables to eat and afterwards, under the direction of our guide, we put the empty dishes into a chute, down which they immediately disappeared."

"That's the sort of housekeeping I'd like," Mrs. Hamilton remarked.

"Yes, ma'am, that's what we thought at first, but we changed our views later.

The Examination

OUR guide soon led us back to the cavern where we had slept and from there to another, larger than any we had as yet seen. We walked to the far end, which was a long distance, but everybody seemed to be drifting that way.

"At the far end we saw a raised platform, and presently out of a tunnel glided a machine upon which were sitting several of the creatures, male and female. Most of them seemed to be very old, for they moved feebly. They took seats on the platform and then everybody looked expectantly at us, and a passage was formed between them directly to the platform. Our guide moved forward and looked at us as if he expected us to follow, but when we hesitated we were quickly passed from hand to hand—with apparently little effort—and we soon found ourselves on the platform.

"In a moment they were stripping us of our clothes. Jim and I were for resisting, but John advised us not to 'because,' he said, 'it can't matter, for no one else is wearing clothes.' Jim did resist a little, but in a moment, he was so helpless that his clothes were taken off him without damage except to his dignity.

"There were a few exclamations from the crowd when they saw our scaleless skins. But these were immediately silenced when three of the people on the platform stepped forward, each with an instrument of three tubes, arranged with a large one above and two smaller ones below. With these set to their eyes, they began a very minute examination, going over every part of us carefully. 'Some sort of X-ray,' I heard John mutter, while Jim called to us, 'What do they think this is, Ellis Island? I'll tell the world I'm a better American than any of them.'

"There were three people on the platform who were evidently stenographers, for each had a thin sheet of metal upon which he seemed to be writing with what John called an electric stylus. Very small sparks flew from the contact with the metal, so that each of them was wearing a pair of dark goggles to protect his eyes.

"The one in the middle, who was examining John, now and again would confer with the others who were examining Jim and me and then would turn to the crowd and address them. Whether what he said was very technical or not, the crowd seemed to understand and the stenographers wrote it down.

"Our clothes meanwhile were passing from hand to hand all through that great company. Our eyes seemed to be a point of great interest, for they examined them several times. They seemed to be rather interested in our lungs also. John thought that the difference of atmospheric pressure between the surface of the earth and this deep place had developed a greater lung capacity in us than in them. In fact, the difference of pressure had been quite noticeable, for each of us had complained of a singing in our ears, and there was a swollen feeling about our heads, although we had found no greater difficulty in breathing. Our hair was another item for special attention, especially Jim's, which was red. They lifted our legs and bent our arms, flexing our muscles just as if they were judges at a horse show.

"At last the examination was over. Our clothes were returned to us and, while we were dressing, those on the platform were conferring with one another. At last a male and female, who seemed to be the oldest and to have authority, with a wave of their hands dismissed at the same time saying something to our self-selected guide.

"We commenced our return to what I might call the home cave, our guide walking as if he had business to attend to, although the crowd lingered and seemed to be discussing us.

"Arrived near where we slept, our guide went to a blank wall space and there made motions with his finger as if he were drawing. Then he held out his hand to John. John at once produced a piece of chalk. Our guide made a rough sketch, first of one of his own people, and then pronounced the word 'Ampu.' We repeated it. 'Great!' said John. 'He's going to teach us the language.'

" 'Hold on, old top,' said Jim, 'introductions are in order.' Pointing to John with an elaborate bow, he spoke his name, which was repeated. He did the same with me, and then he introduced himself. Our guide seemed to catch his intention at once, for he repeated the names distinctly, then introduced himself as Labvo.

"He made rapid, rough sketches of many objects, giving the name and waiting each time till each of us had pronounced the word correctly, whereupon he rubbed out that sketch and produced another.

"Days—if I may so call them—passed rapidly in this way. (We found that the dim illumination, by our watches, was about sixteen hours, while the period of complete darkness, during which we slept, was about eight hours,

so that the day of twenty-four hours corresponded fairly well with our own) At last we had an imperfect but at least working knowledge of the language.

"Then one day Labvo came to us in a timid manner, which was not usual for him, and placed in John's hand a rod of about four feet in length. John examined it and found that it was an electric torch similar to those we had lost, except for its length. As soon as Labvo saw that John recognized it for what it was, he told John that these things were very harmful to the Ampu, their eyes not being accustomed to so strong a light, but the council had realized that, owing to the difference in the structure of our eyes, we could not see very well without them, so they had made them. John at once assured him that we would be very careful how we used them.

"When Labvo saw that we understood, he handed one each to Jim and me. We lost no time in getting to the darker corner of our sleeping alcove and testing them, to find that they threw a splendid light. We spent some time in literally gloating over this splendid gift, for up to now we had seen very little except in a groping way.

"Then Jim began to whisper and, although no one knew a word of our language, whispering seemed to be in order as with all conspirators, for he was at once suggesting a plan for our escape. 'With these torches,' said he, 'we can grab one of their cars, after we learn the trick of operating it, and by directing the light toward anyone who chases us we can keep them from recapturing us.'

"'Nothing doing,' said John emphatically. 'I have already given my parole in regard to these things, and I would not for one moment think of betraying their generous confidence; besides, how far do you think we would get with them? You seem to forget that the torches we brought with us were put out of commission by some invisible, neutralizing ray when we fought them up above. Another thing, what hope would we have of finding our way through probably hundreds of miles of labyrinthine caves and tunnels without a guide? I prefer to take my chances among the Ampu.'

"Labvo came to us again and told us that he wished us to go with him. He led us out to the end of the cave and in a moment, we were seated in one of the swift cars in which we had arrived. A short trip in the dark, then we alighted to enter another cave which was slightly better illuminated than the home cave. From the wall he began to pull out some metal frames that were filled with thin metal leaves. The leaves were strung on rods in the frames, so that there was space to push them along and see between them. We found that each metal leaf was engraved with strange characters. We brought our new lights into play, while Labvo protected his eyes with goggles, but we could make nothing of them.

"He informed us that these were the records of the Ampu, but he had

overlooked the fact that these characters meant nothing to us. They were the strangest books I have ever seen and the most permanent. The walls of the cave were full of them. The Ampu must have had a great history.

"Labvo took us back, greatly disappointed, and left us for that day. The next day he took us back to the hall, or cave, where we were first examined, and there we met the same Ampu again who had conducted the examination. Labvo made a report to them of our progress. They seemed to be as much disappointed as Labvo when they found that we could not read their books. They held a short conference, and Labvo, who was one of the most active of the Ampu, seemed delighted at the result.

"Back in our living quarters again, we were left to our own devices, and we had a better opportunity to look around. We speculated upon the use or significance of the eight balls swinging eternally on their two orbits, but could make nothing of it. The Ampu referred to it as *Octram-ka-listrol*, which literally means the gods of the center, but they resolutely refused to discuss it with us. Considering their reverence for it, we always made the salute when we passed beneath it.

"As there were no Ampu about in the cavern at this time, we made liberal use of our torches and noticed for the first time some strange bird-like creatures that perched high up on the ledges of the cave. Sometimes they flew down to the floor and strutted about like barnyard fowls. They were without plumage of any sort, but seemed to be covered with a dark leather-like skin. At times they would be disturbed by strange scale-covered creatures about the size of a fox. At such times they would fly up, with horrid screams, to their resting places above. John thought that they were probably diminutive descendants of the ancient pterodactyl. They were about the size of a goose, but had a much larger bill and longer legs. There were some lizard forms and some harmless snakes; all seemed perfectly domesticated. Jim wondered which of them provided the meat which we ate at our meals, but said that it didn't matter much, since there could be no preference, judging from externals.

An Archaeological Excursion

"LABVO returned to us shortly after, and we saw that he was equipped for something unusual. Over his shoulder he carried a bag made of the same sort of silky fabric as that on which we slept; we found later that it was filled with food. Hanging at his side was a pouch-like affair, that was suspended from his other shoulder by a cord, in which was stuck a large knife; hanging upon his chest from a small chain, which encircled his neck, was a cone-shaped object about the size of the palm of the hand; later we knew what it was—when we realized the futility of Jim's plans for escape.

“With Labvo were three other young Ampu, two females and a male. All were equipped as was Labvo. Quite obviously they prepared for quite an expedition.

“Labvo invited us to accompany them. When we arrived at the car, which we had learned to call a ‘lofet,’ Jim manifested a little excitement. ‘See here, old man,’ he said to Labvo, ‘not too much speeding; give us a chance to view the scenery,’ quite forgetting that Labvo knew not a word of English. I am afraid he had found our period of education and inaction more monotonous than had John and I.

“Labvo and the others seemed amused when John explained that we should like to stop to see whatever there might be of interest on the way.

“Presently Labvo stopped the lofet. We had not been long in traveling, but we must have covered a tremendous distance. Labvo told the other Ampu to put on their goggles, and then asked John for his torch. It was then we discovered something new about the torches. By turning a knob at the end, we could get anything from a soft twilight effect to that of a powerful search light. Here was something new in electrical torches. Although they never saw one before they examined our broken ones, they had certainly improved on them!

“My comrades and I involuntarily started back when the light was on. The cave before us was full of spiders—standing still and staring at the light of the torches. Never had I seen such enormous spiders. Jim said these were about six times as large as the tarantulas he had seen in the South.

“Labvo assured us, however, that they were perfectly harmless, because, he told us, in the course of many generations they had improved these spiders by selection and trained them to be useful to Ampu.

“Another Ampu now appeared from the side of the cave and began to whistle softly, whereupon the spiders settled down to their business. We now saw that they were working on metal frames, and were not only spinning a thread but were actually weaving it into the thick, soft fabric with which we were already familiar. The Ampu, whom Labvo called Pulebsus, was the superintendent of the spiders; he had several assistants who feed and care for the spiders, and occasionally trained a fresh generation to produce new and intricate weaves.

“After we had started in the lofet again, Labvo slowed down a little to talk to his fellow Ampu. We couldn’t quite catch the drift of their conversation, although there were several references to something called ambala. They all agreed to whatever his suggestion was, and laughed in a quiet way at what seemed to be a good joke. This surprised us not a little, for it was the first evidence they had given of any emotion.

"When the lofet stopped again they left everything on it except their knives. Of course, we carried our torches. We walked for some distance this time, and when the Ampu had preceded us, Labvo gave us permission to put on a dim light in one of the torches so as to aid us in our walk.

"When we arrived at the entrance to another cave, we saw that there were two metal cars across, one above the other. At the ends of these, the Ampu turned knobs and then beckoned us to approach. Inside the cave the vegetable growths were all mixed up like a jungle, which seemed strange after the orderly growths we had seen before, each kind confined to a separate cave. They told us to wait there and then they disappeared. We could hear them laughing quietly among themselves as if in anticipation of some joke. Presently we heard a tremendous roaring, which sounded hollow and awful as it reverberated in those great caverns, and then a thud, thud, thud as of heavy shuffling feet coming from the far side of the cave. We were ready to run, but Jim said, 'I guess this is the joke coming,' so we stood our ground. By the dim light of our torches we saw a dark shape appear at the far side, through a tunnel; I rapidly turned the knob of my torch to get a better view. The thing was about five feet in height but had a tremendously long and thick body, not unlike a rhinoceros with short and very thick legs. It stopped as the light struck it, and its eyes gleamed red; its mouth opened, showing great teeth, while along its spine, and around its neck, like a ruff, it erected a fin-like arrangement, which seemed to clash as it raised and lowered it rapidly. It let loose a terrifying roar, and indeed it was a fearsome spectacle. We were certainly ready to run now, although the thing had hesitated when our light struck it. Then we heard the voices of our friends from behind it. 'Turn down your light, it is too much for us,' and they were actually pushing the thing into the cave and prodding it with their knives to make it advance. Suddenly it jumped free from them and after cavorting clumsily a few times, it turned and fled, bellowing, through the caverns.

"Our friends found difficulty in controlling their laughter, but one of the women who was called Ishtu, said, 'Men are brave like Ampu.' Then they laughed uncontrollably again, so we knew that the remark was an extension of the joke, for we were undoubtedly pale and shaken.

"They explained to us, after their merriment had subsided, that the ambala was a very timid animal, and that despite its terrifying appearance, it made excellent eating.

"Jim, who was never very good at taking a joke against himself, remarked in an aside, 'Not much improvement on the other critters.'

"When Labvo turned the knobs at the ends of the bars again, he explained that the bars were charged with a heavy current, and warned us to be always

careful, as they had to keep the ambala and some other creatures within bounds; otherwise they damaged the crops:

“ ‘Rhubarb, celery and toadstools,’ Jim remarked sarcastically.

“I was glad that our friends could not understand him for he was getting into a bad way, developing a grouch that later became almost murderous, so that we had difficulty in concealing it from the Ampu, who were really treating us extraordinarily well, considering the circumstances.

“We knew that we were well into the upper caverns before we reached our destination. The knowledge that we were so near the upper world affected Jim badly. He was all for making an attempt to get away, no matter at what cost to the four friendly Ampu, but John and I vetoed such a plan, for as John said, we didn’t know how far we would have to go, or what direction to take.

“Labvo directed our attention to some deep scratches on the walls, which seemed very old. For quite a long time we studied them carefully, but could make nothing of them. Meanwhile the Ampu began cleaning them and re-tracing the more obscure lines. Presently John asked Labvo to explain them.

“ ‘We think it is the beginning of the history of the Ampu,’ Labvo told us. We three went at it again, and after John had begun to trace over those ancient scratchings with chalk, of which the Ampu had supplied us with plenty, we began to decipher the meaning of the scratches.

“ ‘Here,’ said John, ‘is a drawing of a great hairy ape. That circle high up must be the sun.’

“ ‘And here,’ said Jim, ‘is another weird critter that must be intended for some sort of animal.’

“ ‘One of the great prehistoric animals,’ said John. ‘I wish I’d read more about that sort of thing.’

“ ‘Prehistoric nightmare, I’d call it,’ said Jim as he continued tracing dim lines, ‘but I remember seeing something of the sort in a museum at some time. I think it was called a Brontosaurus, or some sort of a saurus, anyway.’

“My own contribution began to take form to something like an elephant.

“But John said that it was one of the great extinct mammoths, and that those upright things by the side of it with the radiating lines above were trees.”

“I would have given ten years of my life and all I possess to have made the sort of discoveries that you men did,” interrupted Professor Small. “But please go on, Mr. Everett.”

“Well sir, that drawing covered a great stretch of wall, and John presently suggested that we take a look at the thing as a whole. We stepped back and told the Ampu that we were going to put on our torches to their full extent so they drew far back and adjusted their goggles.

“WE discussed it for some time before the solution dawned upon John. He then called Labvo, but the other male Ampu, who was called Tora, seemed to know more about it than the others.

“‘Look here,’ said John, ‘If, as you say, this is the beginning of your history, it must have had its beginning in the upper world where we came from, for that circle must represent the sun, and these animals could not have lived in these caverns, and that ape, or Neanderthal man, or whatever you choose to call it, must have been one of your ancestors.’

“‘I’m glad to hear you say that,’ said Tora, ‘for it has been a matter of controversy among our wise ones for ages. Some claim that we came from the upper world, as you say, and to which theory I hold, while others claim that we were created by Octram-ka-listrol.’ As he mentioned the gods of the center, each of his companions made that peculiar salute. ‘But, if what you say is so, why are we so different from this creature?’ and he pointed to the drawing of the hairy ape.

“‘All a matter of evolution,’ John told him. ‘I’ll try to explain that to you sometime, for we ourselves are supposed to be descended from the same sort of creature. Yet we are very unlike it now.’

“They then conducted us to another cave, where we commenced work in restoring another scratch drawing. The work went rapidly forward this time, for we had a better idea of what to expect. All the Ampu took part in it, now, except one of the females, whose name was Keraub. It was she who had helped us in our first attempts at cooking in the communal kitchen. She had also been greatly interested in our education, and for some reason had been a close attendant upon John, at times to the point of embarrassment. She now drew from one of the bags six thin slabs of some composite material with which she erected a sort of box. There were no fastenings, but the edges of the material seemed to adhere to one another naturally. Then she placed a small instrument on top and in a little while had prepared food in what, I perceived, was a portable oven, which obtained its heat from wireless electricity through the little instrument on top.

“Several times, while we were eating, Keraub transferred from her own to John’s platter, what she evidently considered tid-bits. Jim and I chaffed him quite a bit, in our own language, about his scaly flapper, which embarrassed him greatly, but the other Ampu seemed to take Keraub’s actions as a matter of course.

“When we had completed our next picture, we were greatly puzzled, and had it not been for the sort of general knowledge that John had acquired in his winters at the public libraries, we would never have solved it.

“At one side there was represented what we took to be some low cliffs

with a large hole at the base. Above them the figures of the sun hung low, around this hole were several figures of the hairy apes, but all were looking backward over their shoulders, except one that was entering the hole. There were a number of animal figures also entering, mostly lizard types. Almost at the far side of the cave was what appeared to be more cliffs, but there were trees growing out from the foot of these. All were bending forward, and some were prostrate as if the cliff had rolled over on them. In between the two sets, of what we thought were cliffs, were a number of prehistoric animals and men lying upon the ground as if asleep or dead. The picture was fairly realistic in a crude sort of way, but it puzzled us greatly, and the Ampu seemed to be unable to help us.

“‘Well!’ said Jim at last, ‘it means something. Couldn’t it be that that is water piled up back there—a tidal wave or a sort of Noah’s flood? Look at the number of animals that are going into the hole.’

“‘No,’ said John, ‘I think these creatures were more intelligent than to go underground in the case of a flood; and a tidal wave would have been equally disastrous.’

“I suggested that perhaps, seeing the way the trees were bending before the opposing cliffs, it was an earthquake.

“John pondered that solution for a time, then said, ‘No, I think the same objections would apply. It was something more prolonged than earthquakes and floods, judging by the permanence of the results upon our friends, but we may be sure that it represents some sort of catastrophe.’

“At last John said, ‘I think I have it. You two have heard of the great glacial periods: geology proves that there were times when ice practically covered what are now the temperate zones of the earth. Well this picture represents the advance of the ice age, when these hairy apes, which some of the Ampu claim were their ancestors, took to living under ground, and I guess that’s how they came to discover that the earth was honeycombed with caverns, which, as we ourselves have discovered, are habitable.’

“We agreed that that was the most practical solution. Then John attempted to explain it to Tora, but he couldn’t seem to find the exact words in the Ampu language. We had never heard the word for ice, and when he spoke of solid water, and then tried with absence of heat, they only smiled uncomprehendingly; it seemed to be something quite outside their experience.

“Finally, Tora said, ‘We do not understand this ice; perhaps our wise ones have knowledge of it.’

“We gave it up at that, and then went on through a great number of caverns, at great speed, in which Labvo said there was nothing of interest.

“When the lofet slowed up again in another great cavern, we found

enough to interest us without having to do restoration work. There were numerous figures on the walls which had been carved in low relief, and the work had been well done. The figures were also very different from the ape-like figures of the other caves; they had a more human appearance; they were comparatively hairless—that is, they did not present the shaggy appearance of the ape figures, but were more like ourselves, smooth of skin.

“The figures were divided into two groups; one group was standing or squatting about in various listless attitudes, with their eyes turned toward the other group, which was marching away from them. In that group the ancient artist had depicted a fine vigor of action; each of the figures was loaded with some sort of bundle, while at the rear was one heroic figure walking backwards, a spear in one arm, stretched toward the direction in which the others were moving, as though inviting the other group to follow.

“‘It looks,’ said John, ‘as though this picture were not so ancient as the others by many a generation, though there was time enough evidently for evolution to have got in some good ticks, judging by the difference in the appearance of these figures. The picture seems to represent an emigration: someone has evidently found a place where conditions for living were better, but as usual, some of them are satisfied where they are.’

“‘This fellow behind,’ said Jim, ‘is evidently the original Christopher Columbus.’

“Keraub, Labvo and Tora agreed with John that these were probably their ancestors, although they could not understand the difference in form.

“Tshtu shook her head and could not agree. ‘No,’ she said, ‘these are a people who were lost; the Ampu were created as they are now by Octam-ka-listrol.’ Again they all made the salute.

JOHN drew us away from the Ampu toward a large pile of rubbish, and then spoke quietly and earnestly to us. ‘Look here fellows, we’re stuck with these Ampu, for a time anyway, and it looks to me as if that difference of opinion about their origin may lead to trouble; let’s try to avoid it.’

“We made a pretense of digging around in the pile of refuse, and threw out some pieces of stone bowls and other utensils. Jim thought at first they were pottery, but we decided that they had been carved from natural rock. Most of them had a design upon them, which John said was the sun, and all of them had a carving of an elephant or mammoth on them. John thought that perhaps the idea had been handed down from their ancestors who had lived on the surface, and these two things—the mammoth and the sun—were probably their gods. We also found a number of bones, some of which John thought were human, but others were too large, and were probably the bones of animals.

"John said that if some of our scientists could see these things, they could probably reconstruct the whole history of these people."

"Ah!" said Professor Small, "Any paleontologist, archeologist or ethnologist would have given his right eye to have seen what you men saw. But I interrupt—please continue Mr. Everett."

"Ishtu seemed to be anxious to go on, and seemed to have lost interest in the whole thing, so we wasted no time in getting back to the lofet. Soon we were speeding through the tunnels again. When we stopped, Labvo said, 'Here are the last of the pictures which we wish to show you, but there is something else near here, of which we hope you will not be afraid, for there is nothing to fear.' And I thought that he handled the little cone hanging upon his chest rather lovingly.

"The pictures were of an entirely different character, and had evidently been carved at long intervals of time. Nearly all depicted scenes of fighting with monstrous beasts. In the earlier pictures, the people were much like those we had seen emigrating from the upper cave. They were armed for the greater part with what appeared to be stone axes, though some were armed with spears.

"John thought that they must have discovered the working and use of metals, otherwise they couldn't possibly have had access to timber for the shafts of their spears.

"The beasts they fought with were different from anything that John had ever seen in his readings of prehistoric beasts, and Jim said there was nothing like them in the museums he had wandered through. So far as I am concerned, I have never seen anything like them even in a nightmare.

"When we came to the pictures of more recent origin, we saw that there was a gradual change in the figures of men. Evidently there had been an attempt to depict, in some figures, scaly bodies and the horny cap upon the head; almost as if two different peoples were mixed up. Here Ishtu seemed to want to argue the questions of origin again; she claimed that the Ampu had found these strange lost people here, had mixed with them, and helped them to overcome the monstrous beasts.

"John drew us away from them as the argument seemed to develop a rather strong feeling, but I noticed that Keraub came with us. She seemed to have no interest in origins.

"While we had been interested in the pictures, we had heard, faintly, some strange, rumbling, echoing sounds that reverberated through the tunnels and caverns hollowly, like distant roaring and shrieking.

"Jim asked what those noises were.

" 'You will be shown,' Keraub answered, and she seemed to shudder.

‘When they are ready,’ and she waved her hand disdainfully toward where we could still hear the voices of controversy.

“When the three came up, Ishtu seemed to be having the last word, and Jim commented that she was like all the rest of the ladies, thus proving that they were as human as we were.

“When he had spoken there came a tremendous roaring that seemed to make the air quiver, then Ishtu began to tremble and shake until her scales rattled.

“‘More proof!’ said Jim, laconically.

“‘Come,’ said Labvo, ‘We will show you where the great beasts were driven and penned in.’ He started away at a rapid pace, closely followed by Keraub, with us three in close attendance, Tora following Ishtu, in the rear.

“We came at last to the entrance of an enormous cavern, the entrance, as usual, protected by the charged bars. When the Ampu had taken a position behind us, Labvo told us to turn on our lights to their full extent. We saw then what we had never expected to find underground. Stretching before us was a great lake, the roof of the cavern being supported by innumerable, gigantic pillars. Although our lights seemed to be as powerful as any searchlight, we could see no farther shore. But from all over the lake came those eldritch shrieks and roars, and we could hear the plunging of great bodies, while the water seethed in turmoil. Dimly, at first, we saw the monsters moving; then they came toward us, attracted by our lights. We had approached fairly close to the water’s edge when a monstrous head shot up out of the water and lunged toward us; we all turned to run back, but John slipped and fell, and that monstrous head and long neck towered above him ready to strike downward. Keraub stopped and leaped back past John, right under that towering head; with a wild cry she snatched the cone from her neck, directed it at that awful head and in a moment it fell with a crash to one side, while the great body slid back into the water. The terrible ray, or whatever power was contained within the cone, continued to play on one of the supporting pillars of the roof and brought it down with a crash.

“With a shout, Tora and Labvo snatched their cones from their breasts and aimed them at the point which the pillar had supported. Immediately the rocks of the roof seemed to fuse and run together into a solid monolith.

“If ever anger was depicted upon the face of an Ampu, it was upon the face of Labvo as he advanced upon Keraub. Jim and I immediately placed ourselves between the two, and although we had dimmed our torches, we were ready to flash them on full in Labvo’s face. They were the only weapon we had, but we were prepared to use them, even knowing that we could be annihilated by the deadly cones.

“Fortunately, Labvo had no intention of wreaking bodily harm; he only demanded that Keraub turn the deadly cone over to him. ‘You know,’ he admonished her, ‘that law of the Ampu—Anyone who uses one thillode of power of the kusom more than is necessary, is not fit to be entrusted with one, and is, therefore, deprived of its use for four hundred days, for the first offense, unless the council, on hearing the circumstances, shall decide otherwise.’

“Keraub handed over the kusom meekly enough, and said, in a voice that trembled. ‘I know, Labvo, but it was John.’

“‘I understand, Keraub,’ said Labvo, with a quiet smile, ‘but the law must be obeyed.’

“WE were all badly shaken by the terrible experience and very anxious to place those charged bars—which, Tora assured us, nothing living could pass, under or over, unless the current were switched off—between us and that awful lake.

“We made a rapid return to the home cavern. After resting for a time, we were called before the council, where Tora gave a report of the expedition, and as far as he was able, gave our interpretation of the pictures.

“We were sorry that he had done that, for the question of origins had been raised again, and there arose the sound of many heated arguments throughout the crowd. The oldest Ampu, however, who seemed to be a sort of leader, chief, or patriarch and was greatly respected, tottered very feebly to his feet, and raising his hand, commanded silence; then he spoke in a thin and quavering voice.

“‘This question of our origin has been before the Ampu for many generations; it can surely wait a little longer. The Ampu of the upper world have referred to a great catastrophe which they call ice, which must have been caused by their gods ages ago. They seem to have a knowledge of this ice and we should like to learn what it was. Let their speaker stand forth and explain.’

“John did his best. He called for water; then, holding the utensil in his hand, he tried to explain the absence of heat. He reminded them that when their ovens were hot, you could not place your hand upon them, but after the current was gone, they got cool enough so that they could be handled without injury. ‘When this change goes further,’ he said, ‘this takes place.’ He then poured out the water and replaced it with a large crystal, which he had brought with him for the purpose.

“One of the council here spoke to the old chief, who smiled and stood up again and said, ‘One of the council informs me that in one of his experiments this thing happened—that water became solid like the crystal. It

seems that in the upper world this is a natural and common phenomenon, which has no counterpart here.'

" 'Now,' said the chief to John, 'explain what happens when all water becomes solid.'

" 'Nothing lives,' said John.

" 'Then how did the Ampu of the upper world, from whom you say you are descended, manage to keep themselves alive?'

"John explained how the glacial catastrophe extended only over certain zones, leaving one wide zone, which was kept warm enough by the sun to sustain life. To that zone our ancestors retreated, instead of entering the caves as the Ampu had done.

"The Ampu expressed their comprehension, but the patriarch wanted to know how our forms had changed from that of the pictured apes to what they were now.

"At that moment I caught sight of Pulebsus, the superintendent of the spiders, and I whispered to John to call Pulebsus up and have him tell how the spiders were developed.

"The idea delighted John and he at once called Pulebsus over and explained to the patriarch that within their own experience was a parallel to what had happened to us.

"Pulebsus was in his glory when he began to talk about his spiders. He explained how a certain Ampu many generations before had been curious about the fabric of the spiders' webs and had noted that some constructed a closer and stronger mesh than others. He experimented and from among them had selected those with the larger bodies and the larger spinnerets. These he had isolated and intermarried. From the offspring of these he had selected the more tractable and with infinite pains had commenced to train them to make their webs upon frames. But so large a work had the experiment become that he had to get the help of some friends, some of whom were unfortunately bitten by the spiders and died. He then selected those with the smaller poison glands until the poison glands were completely eliminated. The spiders, meanwhile, owing to the artificial selection that was going on, developed greatly in size, with the result that the spinnerets were developed in proportion, and they produced a much thicker thread. At the same time, they were trained to make the mesh of their webs closer, which developed a greater flexibility of body, until they were producing the thick, soft fabric with which all Ampu were familiar. Pulebsus would have gone on talking about his spiders indefinitely had not John signified that it was enough.

" 'Now,' said John, turning to the patriarch, 'those same laws that operated

to develop the spiders until they were of service to the Ampu are the same laws that operated upon the Ampu of the upper world, although not consciously applied. The desire to live demanded certain actions; the constant repetition of those actions developed their bodies for an easier performance of those actions, until a new characteristic was formed. Those developing the new characteristic intermarried with others possessing it, where it was recognized as an advantage to the individual, until a new and permanent type was developed. From them, with the constantly changing conditions of life, new types were formed until, as you see, we are like, yet unlike our original ancestors.'

" 'That,' said the patriarch, 'is an idea that it would be well for our council to consider. Can you tell us the history of your people from the time of the ice till now?'

" 'I'll try,' said John.

"He then commenced to draw pictures, showing the development of our race from the crude savage form to man as he is today. He gave an idea of mechanical developments from the first crude stone axes to the forms of modern steam and electrical appliances, explaining as he drew, showing everything he could think of from the naked savage of early times to the clothed and intelligent forms of today; showing also the advancement of building from the rough wigwams of boughs and skins to the great skyscrapers of our cities, and from the rough dug-out canoes of the ancients to the modern ocean liners. He had gradually developed considerable skill with the chalk until, with a few lines and a few words of explanation, he could carry the Ampu through a whole generation of the advancement of civilization. But by the time he was finished he was almost exhausted, for it had been work to which he was not accustomed.

" 'A very wonderful history,' commented the patriarch, while the Ampu wandered up and down the great cavern, discussing the various pictures, but they seemed to be especially interested in the history of machinery.

"Suddenly Jim, who had been a silent spectator, sprang up and, addressing the patriarch, said, 'That stuff is all right as far as it goes, but it doesn't tell you the half of it. Look here, I'll show you.'

"Picking up a piece of chalk, he began to draw with far more facility than John—we hadn't known that he possessed the gift. His drawings were above those of John's, and each was apparently contemporary with the one beneath, but it was a military history of our race.

"As soon as John realized what he was about, he sprang to his feet and shouted excitedly, 'Stop it, Jim; do not let them know that side of us. I have purposely avoided it.'

“ ‘Aw shucks,’ he replied. ‘This can’t do any harm; if we let them know what we can do, they won’t want to start any monkey business with our people up top.’

“In spite of our expostulation, he went on showing the slaughter of men with various weapons, until he arrived at the time of the World War, in which he had been a participant and which he made more realistic than ever with the dropping of bombs from planes, the bursting of shells from great guns, the demolition of buildings and the slaughter of armed men as they rushed hither and yon in the turmoil of battle; he seemed to delight in the carnage he was depicting until he, too, was tired out. Then, turning with a smile and a bow to the silent Ampu, he said with a show of conceit, ‘And that, ladies and gentlemen, will conclude the performance for the present.’

“The Ampu turned their backs upon the pictures, but forming into groups, conversed in low tones very earnestly. The members of the council were also drawn together and were evidently discussing Jim’s revelation, but no one complimented him on his performance. It was very flat for him.

“The Ampu presently began to disperse silently and we also retired to the cavern where we slept. John seemed very depressed and told Jim that he greatly regretted having shown the Ampu the war pictures. In fact, he feared that the chances of our ultimate return to our own place were considerably minimized, for the Ampu had now received such a poor impression of our people that they could not want them to learn of that underworld and its inhabitants.

“ ‘Well, I guess they needed something to stir them up,’ said Jim in extenuation of what he had done. I was inclined to agree with him at the time, for the majority of the Ampu seemed inactive and apathetic. Only those who accompanied us on the expedition to the upper caves with a few others seemed to be at all interested in exploring the uncharted caverns. A few others had some definite occupation, like Pulebsus of the spiders, and some were interested in the growth of the vegetable crops, while all were obliged to take part in the harvesting, but once the products had been gathered into the great store-caverns, machines took care of the rest. In fact, machines had at one time been installed to take care of the preparing and cooking of foods, but the council had had them destroyed, for they were found detrimental to the welfare of the people. The machines, you see, left the majority of them nothing to do.

“There were certain machines to be watched, but those duties were delegated to the priesthood, of whom we learned later. Some few of the council were interested in scientific experiments, but most of them seemed to

spend the greater part of their time in philosophic reflections, which got them nowhere.

“For the most part they were an apathetic and indolent people. The making of machines seemed to have reached the saturation point and they did not seem to understand the art of amusing themselves.

“For two or three days after the report of our expedition we loafed about like the rest of the inhabitants, and then, one night, we were roused from sleep by an earth tremor which seemed to shake the foundations of the caverns.

“When the light came on again, we proceeded to breakfast as usual. We met Tora and Labvo, who told us that there had been a disaster somewhere and they were now waiting the report from the Ampu in charge of the instruments for recording that sort of thing. Investigations, they said, would be started as soon as the definite location was ascertained.

The Lofet

“BY the time we had eaten breakfast the report was in, and a company of them, armed with the deadly kusom, prepared to leave. Ishtu refused to go on the expedition, but Labvo inviting us to go along, Keraub at once attached herself to the party, although she no longer carried the kusom.

“There were three lofets to carry the company. There were no doubts as to the exact location of the disaster, so we soon arrived at the scene. John said it was what geologists called a slip, but it seemed to be miles in extent. The Ampu at once set to work with their kusoms to weld the edge of the rocks that had slipped to those that were still stable and so prevent them from further slipping.

“As this work would occupy some time, John and I returned with Keraub to the lofet. There I asked her to explain the working of the machine. She showed us where, at the front of the car, was a machine which, she said, collected the two forces which were sent out through all the caverns by the great machines near the center. The lofet was more like a bob-sled with seats than anything else. Underneath it was composed of thin slats of different kinds of metals, none of which John or I could recognize. There was a dial in front of the driver’s seat with a lever, which opened or closed any combination of these slats at will. Certain of the metals were operated upon by one of the two forces and other metals by the other force, yet other metals were acted upon in unison by the two forces.

“ ‘What,’ I asked, ‘is the difference in effect of these two forces you refer to?’

“ ‘One force,’ said Keraub, ‘lifts the lofet to any desired height, while the other force drives the lofet in any direction, at any speed, the driver having

perfect control. Generally, the two forces are used together, one raises the lofet a few inches above the floor to avoid friction while the other drives it forward. When the driver wishes to ascend great distances, as we did in coming here, then only one force is used; when he wishes to descend, he cuts off both forces and the lofet drops; an instrument warns him when to apply the forces again to prevent a smash. The two forces can be so combined that the lofet can be made to travel at any angle of ascent or descent.'

" 'It sounds to me,' said John, 'as if these Ampu understand the force of gravity as well as electricity. What a find it would be for our scientists!' Then turning to Keraub, he added, 'I should like to see this lofet in operation; so far, our only experience of it has been in the dark.'

" 'Take your seats,' she replied, 'and in a cavern not far from here, where the walls and roof are smooth, you can see by the light of your torches how it works.'

"She told us to dismount when we reached the caverns. Then strapping herself in and securely fastening the goggles, which she always carried when in our company, she sped around the cavern, then around on the walls and finally made several circuits of the roof in an upside-down position. I noticed that the steering was done by a sharp metal prow at the front of the machine, which moved in a universal joint, just as one sees a gliding sea gull, change its course by a movement of its head, the control being perfect.

" 'There,' she said proudly, when she at last brought the machine to a stop near us. 'Have you anything like that among your machines, you surface Ampu?'

" 'Yes,' John replied, 'we have a machine of recent invention that will perform the same evolutions far above the earth, although the design and the power that are used are very different from yours.'

" 'I should like to visit your people, John,' she said with a sigh.

"When we returned to the place where we had left the other Ampu working upon the slip we found that they had almost completed their task, and Jim, who had stayed to watch the operation, greeted us with: 'Boy! oh, boy! if I only knew the trick of those kusoms—wouldn't they play the deuce in the next war!'

"Tora and Labvo now asked us if we would like to see some other things of interest. We expressed an eager desire to see everything that they cared to show us. They took us on a long run in the lofet; in some places we seemed to be dropping straight down great pits with a spinning motion—down and down, it seemed for miles; then after another horizontal run we would drop down again. It would have been like dropping down in an elevator in an exceedingly tall building, except for that spinning motion which made us

dizzy. We did not talk much, for it was all my stomach and head could do to take care of themselves in those dizzy descents. We were nearly three hours on the way.

“When we finally reached our destination, I began to feel a pricking sensation all over my body and my hair seemed to be standing up and waving to and fro. The three Ampu went into conference for a few moments and then Labvo came to us and said that before we could go further we must take off our clothes.

“Taro told us that to carry metal, such as our belt buckles, watches, pocket knives, and some metal buttons that were on our clothes, would endanger our lives where we were going.

“Jim, with his usual obstinacy, said that he didn’t care whether he saw anything more or not, but finally decided that it would be better than staying in that place alone when he saw that John and I had overcome our scruples and were preparing to go with the Ampu. When we had gotten rid of our clothes, they provided us with some thick sandals, made of some flexible insulating material unknown to us, and provided themselves with similar ones. There was a great quantity of them in a small cave close by.

“As we advanced through the caverns that pricking sensation became more pronounced, and I noticed that whenever we came into contact with each other, minute sparks would flash over the contact. Everything seemed to be charged with electricity, but the Ampu continued to assure us that there was no danger so long as we touched none of our surroundings.

“PRESENTLY we came to a cavern of great size, the floor of which was liquid. I thought of the probability of monsters, such as we had seen in that other underground lake, but the liquid was clear so that we could see the bottom, which was of some crystal-like substance, that seemed to have been molded into a surface like glass.

“Then we saw pillars, that seemed to be of metal, sticking up here and there out of the liquid, and from the top of them, extending to each other, a complicated system of thick metal rods.

“We realized that each of these great caverns was a system of great storage batteries. John asked where the machines or dynamos were that produced the enormous amount of electricity. The Ampu seemed to hesitate in answering. Finally Tora said, ‘Octram-ka-listrol!’

“‘Hm-m,’ said Jim. ‘I could have told you that. Anything they can’t or don’t want to explain, it’s always Octram-ka-listrol. I begin to think that it’s only a bug they have.’

“They took us into other caves where, along each side, tier upon tier, right

up to the roof and apparently extending for miles, were rows upon rows of thin, narrow strips of metal.

" 'These,' said Tora, 'collect the power.'

" 'From where?' asked John.

" 'Octram-ka-listrol,' said Jim with a grin.

"The Ampu looked at him with a peculiar expression, but said nothing more.

"They showed us other caverns that were arranged with the tiers of metal strips, but of a different metal. 'These,' said Tora, 'distribute the power to all parts of the caverns, through the atmosphere, and all machines are so constructed that they draw upon this power, wherever they are, by means of miniature transformers.'

"Although John did not like to urge the question, he suspected that Octram-ka-listrol was some sort of machine, constructed by a mechanical genius in times past, and for which the Ampu had developed a reverence which amounted to worship. The truth of the matter never suggested itself to us, and the Ampu seemed horrified at the idea of explaining it to strangers. But we were to learn, John through the wonderful affection which Ker-aub developed for him, and Jim and me in a terrible manner, which cost Jim his life.

Politics

"WE returned to the upper caverns and there for a long period spent our time in monotonous inaction. John, in talking to me one day as we walked up and down the cavern, like prisoners in penitentiary cells, said, 'If this continues very long, Joe, I'm afraid we shall suffer for it mentally. How the Ampu stand for it, I don't know. I'm a little afraid for Jim, too. He's getting more argumentative every day, and the only thing he can talk about with the Ampu is the question of their origin; his principal controversialist is Ishtu. He seems to delight in antagonizing her, and I have a suspicion that she is preparing something unpleasant for us.'

"We were finally reduced to indulging in childish games, in which some of the Ampu became interested and finally took part, but even that became monotonous. Jim wished that we had a deck of cards and so did I for Jim's sake.

"One day Tora came to John and invited him to attend a conference which was being held surreptitiously by some of the Ampu. John asked if his two comrades might attend.

"Tora replied, 'Joe may, but not Jim. It is only a few of the council who are anxious to inquire into certain questions to which you seem to hold the key.'

"When Tora had departed, John and I strolled casually toward the end of

the cavern, then, following the instructions that Tora had given us, passed through many small winding tunnels until we came to where a tiny spark of light shone upon the ground; here we paused and were at a loss, for we could see no sign of the cave of which Tora had spoken. However, as the light was the sign by which we should know that we had reached our destination, we waited. Slowly we saw a rock in the wall of the tunnel turning on a pivot and a hand appeared, beckoning us to enter.

“Inside the caverns we found a company of the very old men of the council and among them were Tora and Labvo, the only young Ampu present. After we were seated on a rock bench, one of the Ampu addressed John.

“ ‘We are greatly concerned,’ he said, ‘about the welfare of the Ampu. During the last few generations most of them seem to have lost interest in everything; they perform the few duties that are necessary and then spend their time in doing nothing. They do not seem to have energy enough to be discontented.

“ ‘This seems to us to be a very bad condition, for we find by tests that the average of their mentality is growing lower. They are fast descending to the level of the beasts which we kill for food; we, of the council, who are here, dread what the future may bring if this trend continues. Our civilization will decay until the Ampu become like the ambala, which eats what it can find, sleeps and dies.

“ ‘We have noted that you of the surface are of a more vigorous and energetic race, and we are conscious that you are observant and thoughtful; we have also considered the many things you have told us regarding your people and have tried to see in what, essentially, they differ from the Ampu, and whether it would be advisable to change our economic system to conform more to the system that is in vogue among your people, and, if we do, to consider carefully what effect it would have upon the present and future generations of the Ampu.’

“John sat silent and thoughtful so long that I began to wonder if he were going to speak at all. The Ampu, meanwhile, remained thoughtful and patient. At last he spoke.

“ ‘You have placed upon my shoulders a great responsibility,’ he said. ‘I do not feel that I am competent to advise, for it means the welfare of a whole people. The best I can do is to draw a comparison between the economic conditions that exist among your people and among mine; it will then be for you to decide what action is best to be taken. I am hardly fitted even for that task, for I am one of the lowliest of the race of men, lacking in education, and with practically no knowledge of the economics of government. The changes which you wish must come from within the people, rather than

from the outside forces, so that it will be rather for you of the council to lead them into a more vigorous mental and physical mode of living than to try to drive them into it.

“ ‘Well spoken!’ said Onslath, who seemed to be the leader of this section of the council. ‘We admire your humility and respect your reluctance to advise in so grave a matter. The onus of any change will be upon us, we of the council who are here. Now, if you will make that comparison which you have suggested, we will take the matter into very careful consideration among ourselves and decide later if anything shall be done. At the same time, we wish to assure you that we shall in no way be offended if the comparison is derogatory to the Ampu, but shall admire your courage the more.’

“ ‘It seems to me,’ said John ‘that the whole matter can be summed up in one word—work. The Ampu have reached that stage which we consider the top stone of happiness—no need to work. But this state, I see now, is far from desirable. The Ampu have but one necessity and that necessity is food. In your former generations food was provided by your ancestors by the invention and building of machines which take care of that essential almost without effort on the part of the present generation. In fact, so well did they work that the machines were constructed of materials that seem never to wear out, so that there is no call even for occasional repairs. As to your source of power, I know nothing of it, but hope to learn.

“ ‘The deplorable indolence and apathy of the Ampu is the result; they are surfeited with leisure. There is no reason why they should be mentally or physically active, and it is an axiom on the surface that that of the mental or physical which is not used becomes atrophied and can no longer be used.’

“ ‘You have shown us,’ said Onslath, ‘exactly the case of the Ampu. Now show us wherein the surface people differ.’

“John gave them a long description of our civilization, which was made much longer than it might have been, because he had to stop to explain so many things of which they had no experience. For instance, they knew nothing of snow, wind, rain, the oceans and many other things which are common knowledge even to the very young children among us. In effect, he said:

“ ‘The environment of the Ampu and of the surface people is very different. We of the surface have more actual needs than the Ampu, and many things that we did not need at first are as necessary to us now as food.

“ ‘The Ampu need no clothes because the climate in which you live makes them superfluous, but among us clothing is necessary to protect us from the elements and provides a vast amount of work for a great multitude of people.

“ ‘Then, for further protection, we must have shelter, and the building of dwellings provides work for more thousands. Still more thousands do nothing but provide food for all. The proceeds of their labor they exchange for fuel, light, shelter and clothes. But we also are fast approaching the stage where machines will soon be providing all those things; our machines already do a vast amount of that work.’

“ ‘Then soon,’ said Onslath, ‘your people will be like unto the Ampu.’

“ ‘Not for many generations,’ said John, ‘because when these necessities are supplied, we reach out for other things that contribute to our happiness and comfort.’

“ ‘There was a movement among the assembled Ampu at this point, as if they were anxious to miss not a word of what was to follow.

“ ‘We have conquered nearly all of the great elements,’ continued John, ‘cold, heat and storm, as well as the great beasts of prey which threatened our existence. Then we conquered land, water, and air, and harnessed them to our use. The land we made to produce of its best in foods; the water, a great barrier between lands and peoples, we conquered with great machines, so that we now have intercourse between all lands and all peoples and exchange our products as well as our thoughts and inventions. The air we have conquered but recently. It remains to be seen where that conquest may lead us. Two great things alone remain to be conquered, time and space, and we are making strides in that direction. We are conquering time with speed, and space, the space of which you, confined to these caverns, have no conception, we have begun to conquer with the conquest of the air and with another great invention by which one man can speak to another, and even see him, thousands of miles away.’

“ ‘All this,’ said one of the Ampu, ‘has but little bearing on the case of the Ampu, for these elements of which you speak and which were, for the most part, inimical to the existence of your people, play little or no part in the experience of the Ampu.’

“ ‘No,’ said John, ‘you are right, but I mention these things because the continued struggle to overcome them is what has developed our race physically and mentally, and the continued overcoming is what has kept us, and is keeping us, keyed up to and advancing our high standard.

“ ‘Now we return to the economic system of the Ampu. The Ampu hold all things in common; what belongs to one belongs to all, without effort on the part of the individual, and what they now have is the limit of their desire. Among our race, if one would possess anything, even the common necessities of life, even food, lie must first give an adequate return in useful labor. And among us desire of possession is the greatest incentive to labor.

We have invented many things which are not necessary, but pleasing, pleasing to each and every one of the senses, and it is the desire of everyone to possess those things for himself alone, and also to possess so much that more labor becomes unnecessary for him. Few attain that desire, but in the effort their mental and physical qualities are improved in the struggle, so that everything makes for the improvement of the race and the happiness and contentment of the individual.

" 'So,' he continued, 'as far as I can see, the only answer to your problem is to create a desire for things that are not necessary but pleasing. First they must be invented; then a return commensurate with the effort of the inventor or maker must be demanded, so that all will find happiness in labor and its rewards and joy in possessing those things in which his fellows have no part unless they put forth the same amount of effort.'

"They plied John with questions regarding the things which were solely for comfort and pleasure, which he answered to the best of his ability, and they decided that something of the sort must be done to stir the Ampu out of their indolence and apathy.

"John and I had many talks about this time, and time went more pleasantly for us, as we were being constantly consulted by the radical element of the council, who were beginning, secretly, to try to work out things for the salvation of the Ampu.

"Meanwhile, Jim was fast stirring up trouble among the Ampu with his continual controversy about their origin; in fact, they were fast developing into two combative parties, with Jim at the head of one and Ishtu at the head of the other.

"Our expostulations were all in vain. He only said, 'If you think I'm going to mope around like you two, you're badly mistaken. I get a kick out of this, and before long I think I'll have them scrapping, and then, oh, boy, won't we have fun!'

" 'We have warned you,' said John, 'that your fun may lead to disaster, and much as we like you, Jim, we will take no part in protecting you from anything you bring upon yourself through willfulness.'

" 'I'll take the consequences of anything I do without any of your interference,' he replied and walked away.

Octram-ka-listrol

"WE saw little of him during the ensuing days, but Keraub was as the shadow of John. He had overcome the embarrassment he had at first felt from her constant attendance and had learned much from her regarding the history and methods of life of her people. One day he said to her, 'Keraub, you have not been fair to me. I have asked you many times about

Octram-ka-listrol, but you have always evaded the question; now, if you really like me, tell me whether the sign of the eight spheres swinging on the two orbits is a sign of your gods.'

"She seemed almost ready to swoon with fear as she answered, 'Oh, John, it is forbidden, but yes, yes, the sign is the sign of Octram-ka-listrol.' And hurriedly she left us.

"It was several days before we saw her again. Then, looking very pale and sad, she came and sat down by John's side, where he and Tora were very earnestly talking about something that Tora was trying to invent.

"When Tora had gone, Keraub said, 'John, I wish to show you something.'

" 'Can Joe come too?' he asked.

"She seemed terror-stricken at the thought.

" 'Go ahead,' I told John, 'and I'll give some explanation of your absence if inquiries are made.'

"It was two days before they returned. Keraub had such a frightened look that I advised her to hide until she felt better, and John had such a rapt, awe-struck appearance that I seemed hardly able to talk to him. At last I asked him, 'What is it, John, did you see the gods?'

" 'Sh-sh,' he answered, although I had spoken in English, which none of the Ampu understood. 'I can't tell you now, Joe; it's—it's stupendous.'

"He sat down and buried his face in his hands. During the next two days he went about like a man in a daze, but at last he seemed to recover his wonted composure, and I was pleased to see that Keraub was beginning to look more like herself. When she sat down by John, he treated her very tenderly.

"Turning to me, as he fondled one of those scale-covered hands which rested upon his knee, he said, 'Joe, if only Keraub was of our race, I should love her as much as any man ever loved a woman, as it is, I can only feel sorry that she feels as she does about me. But what she did for me is heroic, and a horrible death awaits her if it is ever discovered.'

" 'Come,' he said as he rose to his feet with a reassuring smile for Keraub. 'I will tell you now, but let's get away from everybody first.'

"We had gone some distance before he spoke again. 'Joe,' he said, 'what I shall tell you has never entered the mind of man before. Our scientists seem to be all wrong about the structure of the earth. Their conception of the center of the earth is that it is a molten mass, that through enormous pressure has the density of a solid. A mass that is in density about like iron. A pressure that makes a fluid more rigid than steel. I think that is their principal theory. They have others, of course, as they always do where nothing is proven. They also have a theory of tremendous heat, which is beyond the

recording of their best instruments. They are undoubtedly wrong again. As you must realize, we are probably several hundred miles below the surface of the earth, yet the heat at this point is bearable. Of course, it is of a tropical temperature, with very little variation, but I think that it is produced rather by atmospheric pressure than by an internal source of heat. I have been at least a thousand miles below the surface, and the temperature is not more than a few degrees above what we find here. But what I found there would revolutionize all scientific thought if it were known on the surface.

“ ‘Keraub took me to a place which she alone knows, unless some others have kept the secret to themselves—that is one of the possibilities that she feared more than anything else. She came upon it by accident and never spoke of it to anyone. It is a place deep within the caverns, where one can look upon the most stupendous sight in nature: the internal mechanism of the earth. No wonder the Ampu look upon it as the dwelling place of the gods.

“ ‘In a very small cavern, which we approached through many narrow crevices, we came to a place where a small portion of the floor was of the clearest crystal, so clear that it seemed to the sight as though nothing were there except a hole in the cavern floor. How thick it was, I could not judge, for there was no flaw in it to help the eye; it may have been miles in thickness, but one looked through it as through plate glass.

“ ‘When we came to it, Keraub merely pointed to it and fled the way she had come.

“ ‘As I knelt at the edge of the crystal floor, I saw there was a faint, moving, luminous glow. But as I watched, there swung into view, far away, a great luminous sphere; it glowed softly with a bluish light. I have tried to estimate its size, but naturally that is impossible without instruments or the training of an engineer or astronomer. Still, I should say at the lowest estimate it was fifty miles in diameter. It seemed to be swinging in a slow orbit. Beyond, far away, like large stars, I could see others swinging. I watched, fascinated; time was as nothing. Then slowly came another, swinging along the same orbit, but different from the first, for there issued from it great flashes of light like lightning that seemed to illuminate the whole of that hollow sphere we call the earth. Away, at what seemed to be the center, was one great, brilliant, glowing sphere that seemed stationary.

“ ‘I must have watched for hours, though it seemed like seconds, till four of those moving spheres had passed, and I saw that a second orbit was swinging toward me. Then I understood the significance of the sign of Octram-ka-listrol, about which we have been so curious, and I knew that these were the gods of the Ampu. Such a feeling of reverential awe came

upon me that I must have felt as a pagan feels in the presence of the mystery of his gods.

“ ‘It was with an effort that I shook from myself that feeling of dreadful worship and persuaded myself that these were nothing but natural phenomena which none of our race had seen before, and as such it was a duty to try to record and remember their significant features. I noticed that the spheres were of two classes. When one sort passed, a feeling of lightness came upon me, almost as though I were being thrust away from the floor upon which I was lying. When the other sort passed, it seemed as though my body had become enormously heavy, and in fact I was conscious of being thrust, painfully, against the floor. I feel sure that in this unsuspected internal mechanism of the earth lies the answer to electrical phenomena as well as gravity, of both of which the Ampu seem to understand the control.

“ ‘I knew that hours had passed before I thought of Keraub, and when I found her near where I had left the lofet, I thought at first that she was dead. After she had somewhat recovered her composure, I asked her many questions. She told me that there were eight of the great spheres, four on each of the two orbits which intersect at what, I should think, corresponds with our north and south pole. There was the ninth or central sphere which they never represented in their figures and whose name was never uttered except by the high priest.

“ ‘As nearly as I could figure, the orbits swing from east to west, or in the opposite direction from the revolution of the earth. Whether these revolutions retard the rotation of the earth is for our scientists to prove, but I should think that at least they would create a new theory of the tides. And that small eccentric swing at the poles, which I feel convinced is where the intersection of the orbits occur, would account for the shifting of the magnetic pole.

“ ‘I wonder why our scientists have never arrived at the correct theory of the internal mechanism of the earth. They argue and theorize a great deal by analogy, yet, although they conceive of the atom with its electrons and protons as being analogous to the universe with its suns and planets, they must conceive of the earth, an intermediate thing, as being constructed upon a totally different plan, when they claim that nature works upon a definite plan. Of course,’ he added, ‘it is not for me to criticize our men of great learning, but why should not the phenomena upon which they base their calculations be produced by these unrealized forces as well as by density or mass.

“ ‘Oh! Joe,’ he said with great feeling, ‘if only I were trained as a scientist is trained, instead of being only a poor, ignorant mud pusher—but the time

will come when even the poorest of men will have the advantages of education.

"I expressed a wish to see this wonderful sight, but did not realize how soon, nor under what terrible conditions I was to see the most wonderful thing that man has ever dreamed of.

"We decided to say nothing to Jim about John's adventure, for he seemed on mischief bent and was beyond reason or management.

Disaster

"SOON after John's adventure there began to be more than usual activity among the Ampu, and we found that they were preparing for the periodic festival of Octram-ka-listrol, which took place about once in every fourteen months. The radical section of the council meanwhile had made no definite move in regard to stimulating the Ampu, and we found that they had been waiting until after the festival, because at that time they expected the matriarch and patriarch to abdicate. Onslath, the leader of the radical element, would then automatically become the patriarch and the new order of things could be instituted with less trouble, the patriarch's word being final in all things affecting the welfare of the Ampu.

"At last the eve of the festival arrived, when everyone left for the great temple. We were informed that we were to attend. As all the lofets available would make many trips before all could be assembled at the temple, we found that the Ampu were camping in the caverns surrounding the temple, for none were allowed to enter until the festival commenced.

"The hour arrived and there was an eager expectancy among the assembled Ampu. From a great grilled gateway, composed of precious metals, came the music of a great choir. We had, in all our stay among the Ampu, never heard a note of music before and thought they had no knowledge of harmony, but it seems that all harmony is the prerogative of the gods. As the music commenced, everyone made that strange salute, then the gates swung backward and all slowly entered. Never, in all that I had seen below ground, had I dreamed of so vast and lofty a cavern; unlike the other caverns which had been left more or less in their natural state, this one had every inch of its walls, its pillars and vaulted ceiling wrought in intricate and beautiful designs of carving, painting and overlay of precious metals. There was room in its vast area for all the nation of the Ampu.

"At the far end, which was very far away, was stationed the great choir—the priestly attendants of the temple, who dwelt apart from all other Ampu, and whose principal duty was the worship of the gods and care of the great batteries and machines which supplied power to all that cavernous domain.

" 'The choir chanted, steadily and melodiously, until all were assembled

and stationary; then I saw that the vast floor was composed entirely of that wonderful crystal, of which John had spoken, with a strange light glowing through it and lighting, weirdly, all that vast cavern. We were well to the front, near a large metallic pedestal, in front of the choir.

“An Ampu, of magnificent presence, stood at the side of the pedestal. He bore in his hand a staff or scepter, at the end of which, though detached from it, was the insignia of the gods, the eight spheres swinging on their two orbits in their perpetual round—I have never learned by what mechanism, physical law or necromancy.

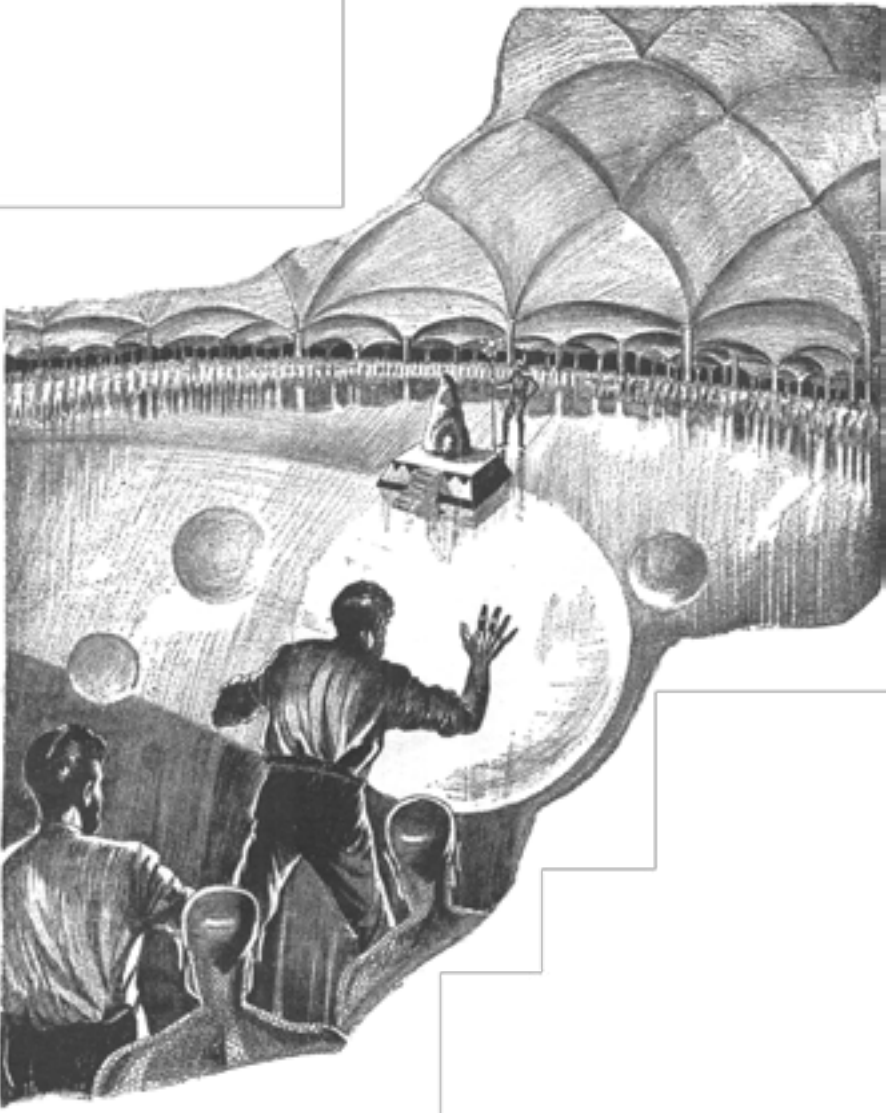
“The High Priest chanted a melodious litany and as it ended, he signaled to Jim with his scepter and invited him to take his stand upon the metallic pedestal or altar. It seems that this altar was directly over the intersection of the orbits of the spheres. The intersection corresponded exactly with the altar once in fourteen months. Jim was nothing loath and advanced with a grin; he was a strange figure, with his long, flowing, fiery red hair and bushy, ruddy beard and ragged clothes, standing there above and in full sight of all that assembly.

“He caught my eye as he looked around with an amused smile and made a gesture of ridicule, which I in nowise answered, for from the moment I had entered the temple I had had a premonition of disaster.

“Suddenly all was hushed and still. From a distance there came a faintly harmonious, yet thunderous sound, which increased rapidly in volume as the moments sped. And then, under the crystal floor, there came into view one of the gigantic spheres, rolling forth that strange, thunderous music of its own. It passed rapidly while I stood gazing down upon it in awe; then it passed beneath the altar and, as it did so, I was conscious of a faint hiss. I looked up, thinking that Jim was still trying to be facetious, even in the presence of that awesome sight, but where he had stood was nothing but a slight, tenuous column of dust like the frail wraith of the man who had stood there but a moment before and which slowly settled to the top of the altar—the first sacrifice of the festival.

“For the first time in my life I fainted and fell prone upon the crystal floor. I woke again to consciousness to find John and Keraub solicitously attending me. They raised me to my feet, and Labvo came and put his arm around my shoulder to comfort and support me. Poor John was not in much better case. Keraub and Tora, like the good friends they were, were doing what they could to comfort him, but I caught sight of the face of Ishtu leering maliciously at us from behind a pillar.

“The music of the choir rolled forth again, and at last came the litany of the High Priest once more. My curiosity overcame me and I looked up to



see who the next victims would be. Then I saw the ancient patriarch and matriarch step forward feebly, with beatific smiles upon their faces. They waved aside the offer of assistance which the High Priest tendered and, hand in hand, tottered up the steps of the shining altar. There they stood, calmly waiting, making the sacred salute, as the second sphere was heard coming near. Then, with hands extended in benediction over the assembly, which they had so long governed, they too returned to the dust front which they came.

“‘A voluntary sacrifice and acceptable to the gods,’ I heard Labvo murmur.

“For twenty-four hours we stayed in the temple, while the festival went on. Eight sacrifices and nine victims, some voluntary and some paying the penalty of neglected duty—the only capital crime among them.

“We heard the temple gates clang shut behind us, closed fast for fourteen months before anyone but the priestly brotherhood would look again upon the Dwelling of the Gods.

“When we had returned, in a chastened mood, to the communal cavern, we found the Ampu assembled in knots and groups, and from snatches of conversation which we overheard, we found that the execution of Jim was not unanimously popular. We took no part in the many debates, for as John said, it looked as if his trouble-making spirit survived.

“Gradually the Ampu drew into two distinct groups, from which first one then another would step forth in animated argument. They seemed, at last, to be aroused from their age-long lethargy. Presently two from opposite sides tried to talk at the same time, and in a few moments, they were fighting, striking, kicking, biting and wrestling. It was the most vigorous action I had ever seen among them.

“Ishtu, who was in the forefront of one group, screaming like a virago, suddenly screamed, ‘The kusoms, the kusoms!’ and in an instant there was a milling, fighting mob struggling to get to where those deadly instruments were kept. The council, pleading, tried to stop them, but being mostly old men and women, were quickly overborne and trampled upon.

“Keraub caught John by the arm and began to drag him away. ‘Come,’ she said, ‘or they will kill you.’

“We three fled together. When we reached the first lofet, I looked back and saw that the kusoms were already in play, doing their deadly work. With such weapons, no battle could last long.

“We fled through the tunnels and caverns at tremendous speed, and presently I thought I heard a sound behind us. ‘They are coming,’ said Keraub, ‘but, oh, if we could only reach the crystalline stratum! The kusom has no power beyond that.’ Then the power in the lofet died.

“‘Come,’ said Keraub, ‘we must leave the lofet and go on foot. It is not far now. Octram-ka-listrol grant that they have not the cherosom, for that is more deadly and powerful than the kusom and can be used beyond the crystalline stratum.’ She seemed to be in a very hysteria of fear.

“I was swifter of foot than Keraub or John, so I ran ahead of them. ‘Come on,’ I called as I caught the gleam of the crystals in my torchlight. ‘Here it is.’

“I turned as I entered the crystal cavern, and at that moment I heard Keraub, with a low moan, stumble and fall. I turned at the sound and saw John stoop and gather her into his arms and come at a stumbling run toward me.

Before I could make a step toward them to help, I saw the evil face of Ishtu, convulsed with all passion, at the turn of the tunnel; she raised the kusom and in a flash Keraub, as she would have wished, died in the arms of John. He crumbled with her, so that their dust lies mingled together far below ground. At the last, I think, that would have been John's wish, too.

"Knowing that I could do nothing for them, I turned and ran, sobbing and cursing, through the cavern. As I ran, I looked back and saw Ishtu aiming the kusom at me. Instinctively I sprang behind a pillar, but sprang too far, so that from the other side I saw Ishtu crumble and dissolve. The invisible ray had struck the crystal pillar and been reflected, so that it killed the killer.

"I could hear others coming on, but could tell by the sound that I was outstripping them, so that at a turn as I left a cavern I paused to listen and look back. It was then I saw my salvation. Just above where my hand rested on the wall, I saw one of those arrow marks which John had made nearly three years before.

"I ran steadily now with the light of my torch to aid me, searching at each turn for the blessed arrow mark. I was running as I had never run before, uphill though it was, and feeling that, through exhaustion, each step would be my last. But fear kept me moving. At last, ahead, I saw a dull gleam of light. I stumbled and fell and the torch was crushed under me. But that dull gleam of light was as hope renewed. I staggered into it and dived and swam as I never had before, and then rose to the surface into the dazzling light of the blessed sun, but blinded by its terrible rays. I floated on the current and at last felt something brush my shoulder. I turned, struggling against the current, and then grasped the branch of a tree. I pulled myself up the river bank and collapsed in the road, where Mr. Hamilton found me."

DURING the last part of Joe Everett's recital Professor Small had been walking to and fro excitedly, making an occasional remark. A minute or two after Joe finished, the Professor suddenly said, "You'd better get our friend to bed," and I saw then that he was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion where he sat.

Professor Small refused to go to bed, but continued to walk to and fro in the house and finally out upon the lawn, where he continued to pace in deep thought. There was very little sleep for me that night, for soon after daylight he was knocking on my door and calling me to get up.

"Here," he said, thrusting the morning paper, which had just arrived, into my hand, "is something that will confirm our friend's story."

There, in bold type, was the startling headline: *Strange Subsidence of the Earth.*

A very large and deep pit, so the item continued, had formed in the earth about six miles from our home, and another and very much larger subsidence was noticed not more than four miles from the first. The usual comments and suggestions of earthquakes and abandoned mines followed.

When I had finished reading, the Professor said, "Well, William, the troglodytes decided to cut off all communication with the surface and the mystery of the earth will remain a mystery for a long, long time, except for what Joe Everett has told us."

Professor Small is soon to deliver a lecture before a gathering of scientists, at which Joe Everett is to be present. The title will be "The revelations of Joseph Everett regarding the inner structure of the earth and its internal mechanism, with their possible relation to unexplained phenomena."

With the assistance of Joe, I am preparing notes for the Professor's new book, which is to be published at an early date, the theme to be "Tangential Evolution."

THE END

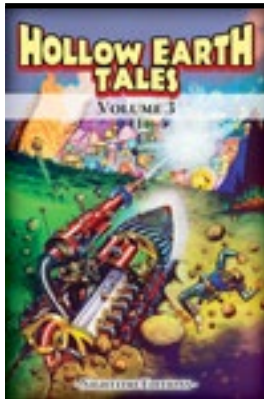
HOLLOW EARTH TALES



VOLUME 1:
 – The Plunge of the “Knupfen” by *Leonard Grover*
 – The Smoky God by *Willis George Emerson*
 – The Annihilator Comes by *Ed Earl Repp*
 – The Strange Voyage of Dr. Penwing by *Richard O. Lewis*
 – The Hollow Planet by *Don Wilcox*
 – The Voice from the Inner World by *A. Hyatt Verrill*
 – The Underground City by *Bertrand L. Shurtleff*



VOLUME 2:
 – A Subterranean Adventure by *George Paul Bauer*
 – The Eye of Balamok by *Victor Rousseau*
 – Death Dives Deep by *Paul Ernst*
 – The Incredible Theory of Dr. Penwing by *Richard O. Lewis*



VOLUME 3:
 – The Hidden World by *Edmond Hamilton*
 – The Inner World by *A. Hyatt Verrill*
 – Enchantress of Lemuria by *Stanton A. Coblentz*



VOLUME 4:
 – Luvium by *A. R. McKenzie*
 – Luvium, Under the Sand by *A. R. McKenzie*
 – Luvium, The Invincible City by *A. R. McKenzie*
 – The Far Detour by *Arthur J. Burks*
 – The Valley of Titans by *L. A. Eshbach*



VOLUME 5:
 – The Troglydotes by *Fred M. Barclay*
 – The Tomb of Time by *Richard Tooker*
 – The Land of the Changing Sun by *William N. Harben*

VOLUME 6:
 Coming Soon!